UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
3 1761 01008021 6

MIST OF MORNING

ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

TOUJOURS
PRET

Richard A. Donald
Toronto Canada.
No 716 ✓

MIST OF MORNING

ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

MIST OF MORNING

BY

ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "UP THE HILL AND OVER,"
"THE SHINING SHIP," ETC.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1919,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

LIBRARY
AUG 27 1968
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

PS
8524
K38M5

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

BOOK I

PAGE
Morning 7

BOOK II

Mist 81

BOOK III

The Clearing of the Mist 241

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/mistofmorning00mackuoft

BOOK I: MORNING

MIST OF MORNING

I

"HEADS for the front door, tails for the back!" David flipped a copper into the air and watched it fall with pretended calm. "Heads it is! Guess I would have gone to the front door anyway."

This was pure bluff but it served to stiffen his courage. He knew it was no light thing for a small boy to ring the front door bell at the house of the Widow Ridley. Boys had tried it before but they had only pulled the handle and then had run away. It was another thing to stand one's ground and deliver a parcel, even when the parcel came from the minister and might be said to be under the protection of the church.

It was a breathlessly hot day. The shadows of the cedar trees lay like dark and pointing fingers over the close cut lawn. The house of the Widow Ridley slumbered in the heat, its wide green shutters closed. But behind those shutters——! David banged the iron gate and marched boldly up the gravelled walk. His hand was already upon the bell to pull it when the door flew open. It opened so silently and so swiftly that it seemed the very worst had happened and that the Widow Ridley would appear in person. But she didn't. The door-opener was not a terrible old woman, with a hooked nose and a very useful cane, but a little girl.

"You boy!" said the little girl. "What do you mean by coming to the front door? Go round to the back directly!"

"Don't have to!"

The antagonists observed each other warily.

What he saw was a thin, pale child, fantastically dressed, or rather draped, in a Persian shawl. A bright red handkerchief was wound, turban fashion, around her head. Her eyes were long and narrow, her chin delicately pointed and, at the present moment, much uplifted. For all her paleness she glowed against the background of the dark hall vivid as a flame.

What she saw was a freckled faced little boy whose hair stood up in the centre, and who dared to grin.

"Go at once!" ordered Rosme, stamping her foot.

"Shan't. The minister sent me. Here's a parcel. Say," with a still wider grin, "is this the whole circus or just the big tent? Don't you want some one to water the elephants?"

Rosme closed the door. It was all she could do, and she intended to do it with quiet dignity. But the boy's grin was really maddening and doors have an uncanny way of divining the moods of humans. It banged.

"Now you've done it!" A tall, blonde girl who had started forward too late to prevent the bang threw a glance of reproachful wonder at the author of it. "Aunt will never sleep through that."

"Truly, Frances, I didn't mean to bang it. It just banged."

Three loud thumps sounded ominously from overhead.

"There she is!" said the child, her long eyes lighting with the lust of battle. "I'll go. You pretend you're out. Here, help me off with this old shawl."

Accentuated thumps, a perfect salvo of them, hastened the undraping process. "The turban too," whispered

Rosme. "Hurry, or she'll smash the chandelier!" Then, as a final bang was followed by sudden silence, "Oh, thank goodness, she's dropped her cane!"

"Perhaps——" began Frances, but Rosme, always quicker in action than her cousin was in thought, was already on her way up stairs. A second later she presented herself, a figure of unhurried calm, at the door of Aunt's bedroom.

"Were you calling, Aunt?"

A groan came hollowly from the bed just visible in the cool depths of the shaded room. But Rosme knew that this was not an answer. It was hardly even the beginning of one. Self-repression was not, at any time, one of Aunt's virtues and just now her natural energy had been reinforced by sleep. When she had expressed herself at great length and with much variety of phrase she groaned and reverted to first causes.

"What was that crash I heard?" she demanded in a fainting voice. "Don't attempt to lie to me! I feel it is the mirror in the front parlor. It is broken—don't deny it! Where is Frances? Where is my cane? Oh, what a terrible thing it is to be helpless and alone!"

"It was only the door that banged, Aunt."

"Only! A door that bangs is nothing! My sleep is nothing! Besides it was not the door. My doors don't bang. If it did, it was done on purpose—to waken me. That is your gratitude. After all I have done for you. Where is Frances? If you didn't break the mirror, she did. I know it is broken. I have ears, I hope."

"Frances is out," fibbed Rosme shamelessly. "She's been up here twenty times to-day. I'm taking her place."

As she spoke she came farther into the room, and, pausing at the foot of the old fashioned bed, looked over gravely at the old lady who lay within.

"If you talk so loud, Aunt," she said in reasonable accents, "you'll begin to cough. And if you cough——" The rest of the sentence was thoughtful silence. Instantly, as if in response to some malign suggestion, the old lady began to cough. She coughed violently and at length. But when she had ceased coughing she took a long breath and began to scold again. The burden of her remarks seemed to be the hardness of heart apparent in Frances and still more noticeable in Rosme, who had no heart at all! Also the appalling lack of gratitude on the part of both to an Aunt who had done so much for them. References were made to the home which had been provided, to board, to clothes, to education, and it was particularly noted that all that was asked in return was a little consideration, a little care. But this of course was too much to expect. Only let their benefactress be confined to her bed for a day or two and what happened? Gallivanting,—gross neglect—every mirror in the house broken, especially the large one in the front parlour bought in England by their dead uncle——

Rosme did not try to interrupt this flow of eloquence. Intent though her attitude was, she was in fact not listening. Having heard it all with variations every day and several times a day for years she may have felt that she did not need to pay strict attention. Instead, she let her mind wander and fell to wondering if in the course of nature it were possible that some day she, Rosme, might come to look like Aunt? If she lived to be seventy-five years old? Perhaps all old people of seventy-five looked like that? If they did, Rosme thought it fortunate that the Psalmist had fixed the orthodox age at three score years and ten. The strength of Aunt's excess age was certainly labour and sorrow—for other people.

Whether some of these musings came through telepathetically to Aunt it is impossible to say, but the volume of her lamentations lessened suddenly.

"What are you thinking of, standing there like a graven image?" she snapped out.

"I was thinking," said Rosme, politely, "that you haven't told me what you want yet. Excuse me, Aunt, but you have coughed your cap all crooked—over the left eye. I'll fix it."

Fix it she did with grave face and deft hand. Then, "What was it you said you wanted, Aunt?"

The old lady was exhausted, if not beaten. A tear of rage shone in her still undimmed eye but her voice was perceptibly weaker.

"You are a heartless child," she quavered, "a hard, bad child! I want that shutter open. I want my cane. I want my medicine. Nobody cares whether I live or die. Nobody——"

Rosme flew to open the shutter and succeeded in making noise enough to drown the remainder of the indictment. She picked up the cane and placed it beside the figure on the bed.

"It isn't medicine time for another hour," she announced dispassionately. "You know Frances *never* forgets your medicine. Is there anything else?"

Two more tears of rage gathered in the old lady's snapping eyes.

"Go away!" she waved feebly. "You are bad. You are heartless. The doctor shall know how disgracefully I am neglected. GO AWAY!"

"Is she all right, Rosme?"

"Yes, all she wanted was a shutter open. In five minutes she'll want it shut, at least she would only I told her you had gone out and I don't think she'll want *me* again just now. Why don't you lie down, till medicine time, Frances? You look tired out. Say Frances, do you think it's worse when she's upstairs or when she's down?"

Frances shook her head with a nervous smile.

All the time Rosme had been upstairs she had been blaming herself for allowing the child to go. But it was true that she was very tired. Even her buoyant youth was drooping under the demands made upon it. Frances Selwyn had both a heart and a conscience. She did her best to satisfy Aunt, but Aunt was insatiable.

As she had rested in the window-seat, trying not to hear the unceasing rumble overhead, she wondered if other people could do better. Only yesterday a visitor had gently suggested that worry belongs entirely to mortal mind. All environment, she had said, is thought-created, and the only reason why every one is not happy and comfortable and good-tempered is because they cannot be brought to think that they are.

"If I try to think that Aunt is pleasant and kind," thought Frances, "will that make Aunt pleasant and kind?" The instant and overwhelming negative was not encouraging. "But of course," she added conscientiously, "that is not a fair test, because I couldn't think that Aunt was pleasant and kind no matter how I tried." There was also the undeniable fact that the visitor's remarks had made Aunt even ruder than usual and her temper ever since had been frightful. Frances and Rosme and Matilda were all tired out with it. Matilda, being a maid, could leave; but the other two, being nieces, couldn't.

"She is going to tell the doctor how dreadfully she is neglected," said Rosme with an impish smile. "So I think I'll go out and play for a while. I'm tired of being Bluebeard's wife and the turban was too hot anyway.

I'll be in the back yard. Whistle three times if you want me."

In the Widow Ridley's philosophy the back yard was to the front garden what the inside of the platter is to the outside. If one's front garden looked well, it was nobody's business what happened to one's back yard. Therefore it behooved her, as a rich and very mean old lady, to spend what money she felt compelled to spend entirely upon the half-moon lawn, the gravel drive, the formal flower beds and the row of fringing cedars. The remainder of her domain, that part which lay behind the green latticed fence and was screened from the street by a high stone wall, she left largely to its own devices. No one save nature had gardened there for years and the result was a chaos dear to the hearts of caterpillars and children.

It was Rosme's particular paradise and she disappeared into it to-day with a sigh of care deferred. Aunt never came here. Even when she was able to walk around she came no farther than the back steps. The long grass soiled her silken skirts; the tangled bushes caught at her ankles and the caterpillars—ugh! Rosme loved the caterpillars on this account. She watched one now with gratitude as it perilously performed high wire acts on a swaying stem beside her. She welcomed the big, green grass-hoppers that jumped into her lap and the yellow bumble-bees that bumbled almost in the meshes of her hair. They were all free of her paradise. Nor did she blame the bees for their preference for her hair. She knew that she had lovely hair. It was luxuriant, beautiful in texture, and in shade a warm and golden bronze. At present it was her one unchallenged beauty.

"I think I shall be Joan of Arc to-day," mused Rosme, throwing herself upon her favourite slope beneath the high stone wall. Since she had come to live with Aunt she had found this sort of dual personality very helpful. It was so nice to leave off being Rosme Selwyn, a little girl with problems too big for her, and to become for the moment any one of the enchanting and delightful people of which dream worlds are full. Joan was one of her favourite alter egos—for Joan had been a fighter and a dreamer too. Very probably she had had an Aunt!

"Now," said Rosme, speaking aloud as she often did when playing by herself. "I am watching my cows (or sheep, or something) in a field where there are some trees. I am thinking of what I am going to have for dinner. I don't know that the Archangel Michael is watching me. But suddenly I hear a voice and I look up——"

Slowly she raised her widening eyes and caught her breath with a little click between her teeth. For there, watching her, was not the Archangel Michael exactly, but the little boy who had brought the parcel!

"You told me to come round to the back, so I came," said the boy.

"Go away again!" said Rosme promptly.

The boy smiled teasingly.

"Go away this minute!"

The boy did not move. Perhaps he couldn't. The wall was high and the boy was short. How had he climbed up, anyway? What was he standing on? Perhaps he was suspended in mid-air by magic? Rosme's always active curiosity got the better of her natural annoyance.

"What are you standing on, boy?" she demanded haughtily.

The boy grinned.

"You'll get pricked if you try to come over."

"Won't," said the boy.

Rosme noticed with an impulse of admiration that his outspread arms were resting upon a smooth board which he had placed across the broken stone on the wall's top.

"Come over then!" she told him tauntingly.

The boy came over.

Rosme hadn't expected that. All the neighbourhood children were properly frightened of Aunt. Not one of them would have dared to scale Aunt's wall. This one did it so quickly and so neatly that Rosme hadn't time to feel outraged. She was without prejudices anyway and it was apparent that a boy who could climb a wall like that might be worth knowing.

The two gave each other a long, measuring glance. Then: "I'm Joan of Arc," said Rosme gravely.

She watched the boy carefully to see if he would laugh. He didn't. This was the first great test. Rosme went a little farther. "I can be any one I like," she declared.

"So can I," said the boy stoutly.

"All right," with a sigh of content, "come on and play."

"You're French yourself, aren't you?" he asked a little shyly. "Is that why you're Joan of Arc?"

"No. But my name is French. Aunt won't let me spell it properly. It ought to be spelled with two 'e's' and a dear, cute little mark over one of them. Aunt says I am English because my father was. I know who you are. You are the little boy of Angus Greig the carpenter."

The little boy of Angus Greig the carpenter admitted his identity with a blush which brought his freckles into painful prominence.

"Don't you go to school?" asked Rosme with a virtuous air.

"Don't you?"

"No I don't. Frances, my cousin, teaches me. Frances has had an expensive education. Aunt gave it to her and now she expects her to do something for it. Aunt is really horrid."

"Oh I say!" the boy looked a trifle shocked at this. Should one, or should one not, speak of Aunts in this manner? Besides, the little girl pronounced the word Aunt with a soft "a." The boy liked the sound of it but felt it his duty not to.

"We don't say 'Aunt' in this country," he admonished, "we say 'Ant.'"

Rosme's steady gaze enveloped him.

"Well, you may if you like," she declared unselfishly.

It took the boy a full minute to see the import of this. When he did, he blushed again. It was an angry blush this time.

Rosme did not seem to notice it. She was engaged in taking the handkerchief from her hair.

"I won't be Joan any more to-day," she declared. "Do you know any stories?"

Her tone was so friendly that the boy thought perhaps he had taken offence unnecessarily.

"Lots," he said, "but I can't tell them."

"Why?"

The boy evidently didn't know why.

"Who tells them to you?"

"Cousin Mattie."

"Have you got a mother?"

The boy shook his head.

"Neither have I. Have you got an Aunt?"

The boy had no Aunt.

"I have," said Rosme with a sigh. "Couldn't you tell me just one story?"

"I could," cautiously. "But it wouldn't sound right."

"Why not?"

"There's one I like when Cousin Mattie tells it. She makes it last a long time. But when I tell it, it only lasts a minute."

"Why?"

The boy considered.

"I seem to leave out the insides," he admitted after a pause.

The meaning of this was quite plain to Rosme who was used to story-telling.

"Never mind," she encouraged, "I can put the insides in for myself. Go on."

The boy fidgeted. "It's about a Prince," he admitted with the embarrassed air of one who feels that he has grown too big for Princes.

"I like Princes."

"It's about a Prince who lived on a hill. One day when he was out on his castle veranda——"

"Balcony," corrected Rosme who had a feeling for words.

"—he saw a Princess far off on another hill, playing ball. She had golden hair——"

"Why?"

"Because Cousin Mattie said so."

"Perhaps her hair was kind of red."

"No, it wasn't."

"Some Princesses have red hair," said Rosme coldly. "Go on."

"The Prince wanted to go to the Princess. So he took his hat——"

"Cap," corrected Rosme softly.

"—and started off. But between the two hills there was a valley with a wood in it. And there was mist in the wood. It was nice there. So instead of going straight through, the Prince played around. Then when he wanted to go on he found that the mist had changed into millions of grey threads. His feet were all tangled up in them. And the grey threads were——"

"Spells!" cried Rosme delighted.

"Yes, spells. And he couldn't break them no matter how he tried, for it was a magic wood and not at all nice when you got tired of it. The Prince hated it but he couldn't get out. He could go to the edge of the wood and see the Princess up on the hill but he couldn't get to her."

"Not ever?"

The boy shook his head.

"Well, I think it's a horrid story. *I* could tell it much better than that. I would make the Princess stop playing ball and come down to get the Prince out. And I would have her hair kind of red, like mine, and so long she could sit on it; and I would tell exactly what she wore when they got married, and what the bride's maids wore and——"

"But you can't! It isn't your story. Things that people wear are stupid anyway. Can you play Pirates?"

"No. I can't."

"I could teach you if you'll promise not to be silly. Are you scared of blood?"

"N—no."

"Lots of blood?"

"No," firmly.

"Well then, come on. This is a dandy place to play. That log can be our ship and this long grass makes spiffing waves! Have you got a skull anywhere?"

Rosme did not have a skull. But she had an imagination which did not need one. And David was a good teacher. He was on his own ground here. He expanded and glowed. The old, gorgeous, gory names tasted strong upon his tongue. Under his vivid words the still, hot garden became the blistering Spanish Main. The log became a Pirate barque. The black flag drooped at the mast. For the moment there was no Prey in sight and the Pirates drowsed. But suddenly, out of the west, a Sail appeared! "Clear the decks! All hands to the culverins! Tumble up, tumble up!" (Rosme, unfortunately, had tumbled down.) "Stand by to board, and No Quarter!"

Every one who has ever played Pirates knows the rest. Some, but perhaps not every one, can cast their memory back recapturing something of the thrill, the shivering rapture which was Rosme's that day as, first mate to the great Blackbeard, she followed that hardy villain to deeds of blood and victory. All afternoon they played; many golden galleons they sank; many more they set on fire. Thousands of miserable Spanish walked the plank, amid the plaudits of British sailormen rescued and restored to freedom. Nor were the Pirates' efforts unrewarded since treasure ships were thick as blackberries. Blackbeard and his trusty crew buried many chests of gold in various desert islands; and the sun was setting and Frances had whistled many times from the back door before Rosme heard, and knew that the pirates' cruise was over.

"I've got to go," she said ruefully, removing a black patch from her eye and restoring a much crumpled middy to its original position. "Boy, I like pirates. If you wish you may come again."

II

MYSTERIOUS as had seemed the entrance of David into the Widow Ridley's back garden, the hidden means employed had been a very ordinary pair of stilts. All the boys were wearing stilts at that time and David's were newly acquired and a matter of some pride.

Nevertheless he did not swagger home upon their high eminence. He knew that he was late for supper and it occurred to him that he might as well be a little later. Perhaps if he were late enough Cousin Mattie would be so concerned about his starving condition that she would forget to remark upon the virtue of promptness at meals. And if Cousin Mattie let it pass, it was likely that his father would do so too, for Angus Greig, though excessively strict in large matters, seldom interfered in those which belonged by right to Miss Mattie's province.

Many things belonged to that province; for Cousin Mattie Greig had kept house for Angus all the years they had lived in Milhampton and no one knew for how many before that. Little indeed was known of their former history, but it was understood that Miss Mattie, when a girl, had been adopted by the mother of Angus and that the two had grown up as brother and sister. Whatever kindness she might have received from her dead relative Miss Mattie had repaid many times over by an unlimited devotion to Angus and the motherless boy. She was all the mother David had known and she had sufficed.

He had never suffered from being "an old maid's child." Miss Mattie was not old. For all her years, which must have been fifty, she had kept the eager heart of a girl. She hadn't meant to. If any one had remonstrated with her she would have agreed that at her age it was most unsuitable. But there it was. She had kept her youth just as she had kept her waist. Perhaps it was because she had kept her waist. These things are subtle. Cousin Mattie's hair was greying but her eyes were clear and untroubled. Her mouth harboured no fretful lines. She was full of a hope which no to-morrow ever justified—or ever quenched. She laughed easily. For the rest, she was a small woman, upright as a dart, with a face which no one called beautiful but which every one loved.

The only thing about her which to David was not quite perfect was her habit of calling him "Davy dear." He didn't mind the "dear" but he hated the "Davy."

To-night, as he came home, he expected to find her engaged, somewhat reproachfully, upon her second cup of tea. But instead she was standing at the door waiting for him. He quickened his steps.

"You're late to-night, Davy dear," said she. Her voice was anxious rather than condemnatory. "Hurry now, like a good boy. Your father's home this hour or more and he wants to see you in the sitting-room."

David forgot that he was a pirate. Suddenly and completely he forgot it! Under its generous layer of dirt his face grew slightly pale. He stood upon one foot and kicked the doorstep with the other. This was to show his careless bravery in face of adversity. The last time his father had wished to see him in the sitting-room had been upon an occasion which—but why bring up forgotten trifles?

"What's he want me for?" asked David with fine indifference.

"I don't know," said Cousin Mattie; adding with some point, "I thought you might."

"Well, I don't."

"Davy dear, I hope you haven't been doing anything you shouldn't?"

David's face held all the just indignation of one who never by any chance does what he shouldn't.

Miss Mattie suppressed a smile. "Very well," she said, "only if I were you, I'd hurry."

David hurried. There was a slight delay owing to the necessity of washing (who ever heard of a clean pirate?). But he certainly hurried. This was due to a doubt of his father's patience which was not misplaced. Delay of any sort was abhorrent to Angus Greig. David in his boyish way understood this, and other things about his father, very well.

A stern, unbending man was Greig the carpenter. A silent, proud man, slow to anger but not at all plenteous in mercy. A man for the righteous to trust in and for the wicked to flee from. David knew this. He was proud of his father: but not in any intimate way. It was more as if he were being proud of a fellow townsman or a hero in a book. Other fellows' fathers were easy going, every day persons capable of being called "Dad." David felt that this was pleasant, but that it lacked dignity.

Of his father's feeling for him he was not sure. With ordinary fathers one could tell, but with his one couldn't. There was a reserve. Never, in all his memories, had David got past that reserve, nor had he ever tried to. From his father he had always had justice and kindness. Miss Mattie had supplied his other needs.

His mother David had never known nor did Angus ever refer to her in any way. Miss Mattie was inclined to be more communicative but even she had little to say.

"But you knew my mother, didn't you?" David would question.

"Yes." Miss Mattie had known his mother—in a way. Not that they had ever been intimate friends.

"Tell me about her."

"She was bonny," said Miss Mattie who liked a good Scottish word.

David was dissatisfied with this. Of course she was bonny. He wanted to know other things. He wanted to know what she *looked* like. Did she look like him?

"Of course not," said Miss Mattie. "Didn't I just tell you she was bonny? And yet there is a kind of queer something in you that's like her. I notice it whiles. You have a light step, Davy dear, and she had a light step. She had the lightest step of any of us. When she danced we all seemed heavy and slow beside her. I mind seeing her dance once before——"

She checked herself and, being engaged in washing dishes at the time, somehow seemed to forget her sentence in the rattle of the plates. But David leaped upon it.

"Before what?" he demanded.

"Before she was married," said Miss Mattie slowly.

"Didn't she dance after she was married?"

"I didn't just happen to see her dancing."

"Didn't you live with her?"

"No."

"I think it would have been nice if you had lived with her."

Miss Mattie smiled at that but it did not entice her into prolonging the conversation.

She had the gift of story-telling, this mother-by-proxy. Her romances were the delight of David's childhood and had been the preparation which had enabled him not to laugh at Rosme and her Joan of Arc. He had breathed the enchanted air of make-believe and knew that, of all things, laughter breaks the spell most surely.

Sometimes the little boy fancied that Miss Mattie's stories were about his mother although she did not say so. It puzzled him, so that sometimes he grew confused between truth and fiction. Then he would say, "Is it truth or story-truth?" Always knowing that he could trust her answer. But more often he let it go by. It was always pleasant either way.

Out of it all he gathered a few vivid pictures of his mother which he was always to cherish. He saw her very young and gay,—"An only daughter," Miss Mattie said, "who had more dresses in a year than I had in two. One muslin, I mind, had green sprigs in it and she wore a green ribbon in her hair. She looked like a bit of Spring and Angus didn't take his eyes off her all morning. In church it was too. He didn't even hear the text, for I asked him when we came out."

Another picture David liked to think of showed her dancing, all in white, "like a thistle-top in the wind." In a quieter one she was busy in his father's home, making butter, with her sleeves rolled up "to show the dimples in her elbows." He saw her in a sunbonnet playing at tossing hay in the field for she had been a farmer's daughter. But never did he see her with a baby in her arms. He hardly understood the ache in his heart, but he knew he would have loved to see her like that!

The last picture he had was the one which showed her as a bride. And it was very sketchy. "She looked as sweet as a flower and the gladdest thing I ever saw," was all Cousin Mattie would ever say.

"What did my father look like?" asked David.

There was a noticeable pause, and then—"Nobody was looking at your father," said Miss Mattie. "Now go your ways for I'm busy this morning."

All this time we have been keeping Angus Greig waiting. But David didn't. A splash of water, in such places as it would do most good, the slam of a brush upon his rumpled hair, and the reformed pirate hurried into the sitting-room, outwardly shy and inclined to be sulky, inwardly on fire with curiosity and a little bit afraid.

The carpenter was standing by the window and turned at his entrance. David saw to his astonishment that he did not seem angry at all. There was not even impatience on his face. Instead it was kinder than the boy was accustomed to seeing it. But it bore a look for which he had no words; if he had been older he might have said that Angus looked "shaken." It was very apparent that something had happened.

"It's you, David! Come away in. There's news you must know." His glance fell upon a strip of yellow paper he held in his hand.

David came in, sideways, and sat down gingerly on the very edge of a chair. There was a momentary flash from the eye of Angus.

"Sit properly upon your chair and answer when I speak to you."

"Yes, sir," said David stolidly.

Angus sat down by the table and tapped its polished surface with the yellow paper. He seemed uncertain what to do next, and to see his father at a loss was so amazing a spectacle that David's eyes grew grave and round. Words came hard to the silent Scottish carpenter. He dropped the paper and picked it up. He ruffled his grey hair with his large hand.

"You see, David lad," he began at last with an effort that was even physically apparent, "there's news that I must tell you. I've a telegram this afternoon. Your father's dead!"

"Yes, sir," said David. He didn't know that he said it.

Had his father suddenly gone mad?

He didn't look mad. After making this foolish statement he drew a long breath and seemed unaccountably relieved. His gaze, turned now directly on the boy, grew momentarily kinder.

"I've told you too bluntly," he said, "but I'm a blunt man. Perhaps I should have left it to Mattie. But it seemed like shirking my duty."

He looked keenly at the boy's inexpressive face and went on.

"I'm maybe wrong but sometimes I've thought that you guessed that you and I—that I am not your father." David said nothing. He certainly had not guessed anything of the kind. His mind turned slowly from the contemplation of Angus as a mad father to the idea of him as no father at all. And suddenly, like a kind of miracle, it seemed that, although he hadn't guessed it, he had always *known* it. There was nothing new to him in the fact so briefly stated. And, with its realisation, he too was conscious of an odd sense of relief.

"Did you guess it, or didn't you?" asked Angus.

David stammered "I—I d—on't know."

Angus nodded. He seemed to understand.

"Perhaps I should have told you long ago," he said meditatively. "We might have got a bit nearer if I had. The untold truth has been a barrier between us. But I didn't want you to know while—while he lived." He glanced at the telegram in his hand.

David's eyes followed his glance and silence fell. David was frightened of the silence. He was frightened of the sombre look on the carpenter's face. He was frightened most of all, though proud also, at being spoken to in this way, almost as man to man.

"My mother?" He ventured at last tentatively. How terrible it would be if he hadn't a mother either!

Angus roused himself with a great effort.

"Long dead," he said. "She died when you were born. She was to have been my wife. But she married him. I never married. So," he added slowly, "though you are not my son, you are all the son I'll ever have. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said David. He did understand. The words were like a warm hand held out in the darkness.

Now that the essential explanation was out of the way Angus Greig began to speak more easily.

"You may feel like blaming me for keeping you from your real father, my lad," said he, "but you wouldn't if you knew. I must tell you the truth for both our sakes. And the truth is hard." He became more Scottish as he became more articulate. "Your father, David, was no father for a bairn. And he was no husband for a lass. He killed your mother, David—and she was the bonniest thing God ever made!"

The long ingrained reserve was breaking down a little, under stress. Boy though he was, David became conscious of the terrible restraint which alone enabled this man to speak as he tried to speak, simply and quietly. Yet no amount of wild declamation could have been so impressive as this.

"He killed her," said Angus.

Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

David said nothing at all.

"I'll tell you the story—if I can. It's your right. Your mother and I were engaged. We were to be married soon. Then he came. She had given me her promise but she gave him her heart. I'm not blaming her. The God that permitted it knows why she loved him. He was younger than me by eight years and he was handsome. I was somewhat old for her—yes, somewhat old. He had the manners of one who holds himself above the common. Perhaps he was above the common in birth. I've naught against birth. But there's bad ones in all classes. And he was bad." Angus the carpenter brought his great fist down upon the table with a crash. "So bad was he that no animal could abide him, no child would trust him, the fresh flowers faded and died in his rooms. And so did she, my lovely flower! May the devil claw his clatty soul!"

At this frightful expression which could surely be nothing less than the most searing oath, David shivered and shrank in his chair. Never in his life had he heard Angus swear!

The level voice went on. "He was a kind of doctor; a scientist, he called himself. He did not heal the sick. He sought for knowledge. He wished to make his name a famous one. Perhaps he also craved knowledge for its own sake. I don't know. He was what is called a vivisectionist. Do you know what that is, David? It's a man who tortures dumb beasts to wrest the secrets of life from their agonies."

Here his ineradicable sense of justice halted him and he added sternly, "I'll not say that it's never justified. I'll not say that something of that sort is not necessary. But not in his ways and not by men like him. His heart was a stone. Terror he loved, and shrinking and cries in the night. I speak of what I know, my lad. There was no crueler devil in hell!——

"She didn't know it. We none of us knew it then. And the outside of him was fair enough. He saw her and he craved her and he took her, in the only way he could have taken her, as his wedded wife."

The carpenter sat silent awhile, his fingers twining and untwining. Then—"She went into that house of horror a blooming girl. I saw her, only a few weeks after—and she was already stricken."

He paused again, a long pause this time.

"She hid herself away from us at first. She had no mother and her father was old. But when she got to the end and knew it was the end, she came to me—to me and Mattie.

" 'You are strong, Angus,' she said, 'you will keep my child from—that!'

"I promised her. She stayed with us until she went away. Her husband made no trouble. He was busy on a new idea, and he was through with her.

"When she was dead, he threatened to take you, David, but—there was a way. He didn't take you. Soon after, Mattie and you and I came here to live."

"Why didn't he take me?" asked David. His wide grey eyes were fixed unwinkingly on Angus' face. His voice was almost a whisper.

"I'll not tell you that, I think."

"I want to know!"

"Well then—I am speaking to you as a man, David—I paid him. He wanted money, always. He never had enough for his experiments, and his pleasures. I had some money. He took it and he let you go."

The boy's eyes shut suddenly, his strong, little hands clenched.

"He killed my mother and he sold me?"

Angus turned away. Had he been right after all in telling the boy so much?

"You know it all now, laddy. And he is dead, remember that. His name——"

A small, cold hand stopped the word upon his lips and two eyes cold as steel looked into his.

"I never want to know his name!" said David.

III

THE agonies of childhood are poignant things. Perhaps they are the worst agonies of all. A child is so sure that the world was intended to be a happy place; he is so conscious of his birthright of joy, that pain and sorrow come as alien things, torturing, impossible to be borne. A child in trouble looks out upon the sunny day with dull and wondering eyes. In his heart has sprung the insistent question which life propounds but does not answer—"Why?"

A childish sorrow is forever. Since he has no perspective the child cannot see it getting smaller in the distance. He cannot glimpse a to-morrow where his sorrow may not be. He has not yet learned to say "This too will pass."

When David came out of the sitting-room that evening he came out to a changed world—a world that had fear in it, a world that held dark mysteries, a world hiding unspeakable things behind a shallow smile. He saw his stilts leaning against the kitchen door. He saw the flush of sunset on the white door step. His cat came and rubbed herself against his legs. Was it possible that he had ever taken pleasure in these things? Roughly he pushed the cat away—and immediately a stab of fear which was like a physical pain turned his brown face pale. Perhaps his father had kicked cats—just like that! Oh, how hateful life was, how hateful!

There was a delectable smell in the air; a smell, that is, which David recognised as having once been delectable. Cousin Mattie appeared in the doorway of the summer kitchen. She was smiling and smoothing down her waist.

"Pancakes!" said Miss Mattie, "and just ready this minute. Come along now and have them while they're hot." Then, catching sight of his face, "Why, Davy *dear!*"

But David in these first moments did not want sympathy. Neither did he want pancakes. He turned and fled: out through the afterglow of the sunset, criss-cross over the empty field on the corner, and down to the river where there were trees and twilight. There was a certain nook there where he could slip away and hide.

All his life after he remembered that night. The strong scent of sun-warmed grass under the dew, the quiet slip-slipping of the darkening water, the sudden note of a sleepy bird, the "plop" of a fat frog into the stream. After what might has been a few moments or a century, he stole home through the cool, velvet blackness of midnight, finding the back door on the catch for him and some milk and buttered scone upon the table. The sight of these awoke no healthy hunger, he was too sick at heart yet. He stole past them on tip-toe and so up the stairs with infinite precaution lest he waken Cousin Mattie. Then came the safety of his own familiar room under the eaves and the endless, sleepless hours through which he grappled with this strange new world that had trouble in it.

It was all the worse because the fear and horror he felt were of something formless and vague. They were all mixed up with chance words he had heard concerning the curses of inheritance, and texts and sermons he had listened to at times when he was not too sleepy. There was one about "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the childrens' teeth are set on edge." He remembered this particularly because he knew the shuddery, edgy feeling of sour grapes upon one's teeth. He had listened to the sermon on that account and had heard some rather horrible things. David hadn't minded them at the time. He had felt so sure in having Angus for a father.

But now it all came back!

There was another sermon, too, about the "sins of the fathers" which shall be visited on the children unto the third and fourth generation. David knew that he was a generation, so his fate seemed fairly clear. God was not likely to consider the fact that he hadn't chosen his father. That was the trouble with God—you could not argue with Him. Neither could you "get round" Him. Neither could you hide. If He said He would visit the sins of the father's, He would certainly do it—and no back talk!

"If it was a lion or a bear," thought David to himself—"If it was two lions and two bears, or if it was a burglar with a gun I wouldn't be afraid. Oh, if it was only something I could *fight*!"

Many things began to be plain to him as he lay and remembered. There was one day, a long time ago, the day he had tied a tin can to a dog's tail. He wanted to see what a dog did under such trying circumstances. Fellows had told him that the results were very funny. He, too, had found them funny and he had been laughing heartily when Angus Greig had caught him doing it. Such a thrashing followed as David had never had before. David had always wondered about that thrashing. He had taken it philosophically, for little unpleasantnesses of this kind happen to every boy, but he had been puzzled by the length and the strength of it. Angus had been furious, and it had seemed such a little thing to be furious about. Now—oh now, he saw the thing in a white light. He understood. And hiding his head he bit the pillow with his strong, young teeth.

Cousin Mattie, too! He remembered the day he had pulled a wing off a fly to see if a fly can fly with one wing? And, if so, if it would fly lopsided? It had seemed to him a perfectly legitimate investigation, but Cousin Mattie had seen him doing it. He could hear her horrified "Oh Davy!" yet: She had been absurdly upset. She had said, "Don't you know that you *hurt* the fly?" David, with a swift vision of Cousin Mattie on the war-path with a fly-swatter, had retorted "What's an old fly? You kill hundreds of 'em every day yourself."

"I kill them" she had answered grimly, "because they are pests. They have to be killed. But I don't hurt them."

David had laughed at that. It was so like Cousin Mattie to say a girlish thing like that. But now he knew what she must have been thinking. He knew what that look of uneasy wonder in her eyes had meant. *Cousin Mattie had been remembering about his father.*

His brain whirled on. There was that day when Angus had had lumbago and old Doctor Temple had been called in. He had patted David on the back and said he was a fine lad and Angus ought to be proud of him. Then he had shaken hands with him and had held his hand a moment, examining it curiously.

"A surgeon's hand," he had remarked, "a very fine hand. Shouldn't wonder if that hand will do big things one day."

David had felt embarrassed but he thought it very nice of the doctor to say such things. He had stolen a glance at his father's face hoping to see approval there and he had been much astonished and puzzled by what he did see. He saw fury, pure and simple. This, too, was plain reading now. *He had a hand like his father!*

Was it possible that once he had been an ordinary little boy playing pirates with a red-headed little girl and bossing her around and being happy? He lifted his tousled head from his hot pillow with a gasping sigh.

"Davy dear!——"

Cousin Mattie in white nightgown and kimono was standing in the doorway. In the dim light of the room with her unlined face and her hair down her back she looked so young that David was startled.

"You're not asleep?" asked Cousin Mattie.

David made no answer but she did not wait for any. Instead she came over to the bed and sat down on it. David felt a cool hand on his head.

"I've always told Angus that he has no tact," said Cousin Mattie in an annoyed voice.

This was so like an ordinary every-day remark that David was almost shocked. Cousin Mattie worshipped "tact." She considered that she herself had an uncommon amount of it and that few other people had any at all. If they had, living would become a comparatively simple matter. People are sensitive and want of tact is so distressing. If people would only leave things to Miss Mattie she would show them what a little tact would do.

"Angus ought really to have allowed me to tell you," she said, as the fine fingers pressed away the frown on the boy's hot forehead. "Or he ought to have told you long ago, when you were smaller, in a tactful manner. Then there would have been no shock. And you and he would have got along much better. As it is you are feverish. I have brought you some quinine."

This was very much indeed like ordinary life. David found that he was still able to hate quinine. Cousin Mattie went on:

"There is no use in a man pretending to be a father when he isn't. It takes an immense amount of tact and men simply haven't got it. I told Angus that. You and he would have been good friends years ago if he had told you the truth. Don't you feel it yourself?"

She didn't wait to hear whether David felt it or not but pursued her own thoughts.

"It was a strain on Angus—trying to be a father when he wasn't. It made him cross. Angus hates deceit like poison and he knew he was deceiving you. I advised him to take the minister's advice in the matter but he never would. You know, Davy dear, Angus is a very fine man, but hard to advise."

Then, with a sudden change to brisk decision, "Now look here, Davy, I want to know just what it is that you're fretting about. You won't mind telling an old lady like your Cousin Mattie (Mattie always found it a delicious joke to call herself old) and anyway I'm going to sit here till you do."

David felt sure he could never tell but somehow it was a comfort to have her there. He crept a little closer to her, and she, feeling the pressure of his young warm body, understood his need and loved him even as his own mother might have loved. But she knew better than to show it. Presently, very gently, she put her finger on the sore place.

"I expect Angus said a lot of things about your father?" she said. She felt the lad shiver.

"He wasn't a nice man," she continued reflectively. "There are lots of men who aren't nice. He didn't make your mother happy. Lots of men are quite horrid to their wives, so I've heard, although I always think that if a woman has enough tact——"

David had begun to cry convulsively.

Things were a little better after that. Miss Mattie draped a quilt over the kimono, for the early morning air was beginning to blow cool, and then when David had finished crying she talked to him and told him "things." Somehow her very talking of things seemed to make them less dreadful. Little by little, David found that he could talk too. He asked questions. He asked if Angus Greig had loved his mother very much.

"He loved her," said Cousin Mattie, "as every woman prays to be loved and as few ever are. He has never really loved any one else, unless it's you."

"He doesn't love me," said David with miserable certainty.

"Yes he does. You'll begin to feel it more now that you know the truth. It's been the sense of deceit that's kept him stiff with you. But I've seen him looking at you, when he did not know that I saw, and I know. You're all he has in the world. I wouldn't lie to you, my dear. Whiles indeed, I've envied you. It's not a small thing to be loved by Angus Greig."

David found some comfort in this. Cousin Mattie might be right. Perhaps Angus did love him and if he did there was hope. Angus Greig was not the man to love any one who was utterly bad and wicked. Then, in a burst, the heart of the trouble betrayed itself. Miss Mattie felt a hard little hand grasp hers.

"But," whispered David. "When I grow up? when all the sins are visited! Oh, if I could only fight, I wouldn't be afraid!"

Miss Mattie was shocked. And she was furious with Angus. What inexcusably tactless blunders he must have made to implant this ghastly fear in the mind of the sensitive child? She was an old-fashioned woman and she had never studied child psychology but she knew danger when she saw it. Something must be done to combat this idea and at once.

Perhaps the child's guardian angel stooped near and whispered; perhaps it was pure instinct which taught

Miss Mattie in this crisis; perhaps it was a simple understanding, the outgrowth of her own eternal youngness which suited her to his need. At any rate her answer was the right one and it came with authority.

"You can fight, Davy. That's just exactly what you can do. You can fight things inside as well as out. It may be harder, but brave people don't mind hardness. If there were things in your father that you're afraid may be in you—fight them! Watch for them and turn them out. Be your own man."

"But—you can't fight God."

"You're not fighting God. You're fighting evil. God likes fighters. Struggle makes men strong. That's why he lets us have things to fight. Who would ever have heard of St. George if it had not been for the dragon?"

David knew all about St. George and the dragon.

"Besides," she went on thoughtfully, "there's another part to that text about the sins of the fathers. It says that God shows mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Him—you mustn't forget your mother, Davy dear. She was sweet and good and pure, and you are her son."

A little of the dull weight on David's heart seemed to gather and roll away. It was true, he had forgotten that part, or else the minister hadn't mentioned it. There was room for a fight then. He wasn't all bad. And if one were a good fighter——"

Miss Mattie heard the long drawn sigh and knew that it meant a slackening of the strain. She judged that he wouldn't mind if she kissed him, once, upon the forehead. Then, if she left him, he might go to sleep.

But still David held her hand.

"Cousin Mattie," he whispered, "do you remember about—about the fly?"

Her puzzled, "What fly?" was balm to the boy.

"The fly I pulled the wing off."

"Did you?" she smiled understandingly. "Would you do it now?"

He shivered.

"Of course you wouldn't! And you wouldn't have done it then if you had thought that it would hurt the fly. I'll tell you this, Davy dear, I've watched you grow from a tiny baby and if I'm any judge at all you're as unlike your father as any child can well be. Don't get morbid and don't waste your strength in fighting windmills. You'll have your own sins to fight but they will not be his sins—your very horror of them proves that."

"But why does it happen to some sons and not to others?"

"Ah, now, that's a question no one can answer."

"But if I had a brother, might it happen to him?"

"It might, I suppose."

Miss Mattie was often sorry afterwards that she had admitted this because in days to come this mythical brother of David's was to lie heavily upon his mind. He became, because of much thinking, almost a real person and one about whose fate David was much exercised. "If my brother should do so-and-so," he would say, "it wouldn't be fair to blame him, would it?" Miss Mattie disliked this. She thought it almost uncanny; but her protests were of no avail. Only with growing years and many new interests did David's scapegoat brother fade into the mists from which he had emerged.

"You must go to sleep now," she added with kindly authority.

But David had not quite finished.

"Do I look like my—like him?" he asked anxiously.

Miss Mattie shook her head.

"No, not much. Sometimes there's a resemblance. I don't know just who you do look like. Your father, whatever his faults, was a very handsome man. You may be better looking when you grow up. At least, I mean, not like him of course," Miss Mattie stammered a little, clearly perceiving an error of tact, "more like your mother. She was a lovely creature. I'd be proud to have a mother like her. Now go to sleep and when you wake up in the morning everything will be all right again."

"Why?" asked David timidly.

"Because it always is," said Miss Mattie.

It was her philosophy of life.

IV

JOY does not always come in the morning, but, if it comes at all, it is likely to come then. The vital forces flow back refreshed by sleep; the spirit wakens strengthened by its mysterious travels; the darkness is over and gone, the birds sing; up comes the smiling, yellow sun. Grief must be bitter indeed which finds no touch of solace in a waking world.

David was out of bed with a bound and had one boot partly laced before he remembered how miserable he was. His troubles returned with a sudden sinking of the heart, followed by a bewildered anger that his heart could sink. He stopped lacing his boot and frowned. To feel that leaden weight at his heart while all the summer world was stirring with the joyous pulse of morning was an astonishment and grievance unbelievable. Why are boys born at all if they can't be happy? It's not a fair deal. David doubled up his small, hard fist and shook it in the face of a mismanaged universe.

But though his ordered, care-free world had vanished into chaos over night, things were not quite so bad, not quite so bad and hopeless, as they had been before Cousin Mattie had come to sit upon his bed. Bits of their midnight talk drifted back with reassuring effect. The very fact of their having talked at all was reassuring. It is the hidden, unspoken fear, the formless terror which shakes the heart. Clothe a fear in words and already you have it by the throat.

Rather to his surprise, David found that he was hungry. The thought of hot scone for breakfast left him not unmoved. The possibility of honey tickled the senses. He laced up the other boot. It hardly needed Miss Mattie's cheery call to hurry him with the remainder of his somewhat sketchy toilet.

In the kitchen another surprise awaited him. Everything was just as it always had been. There was no outward and visible sign of the inward change. His father (he couldn't help thinking of Angus as his father) sat as usual at the head of the table with a plate of bacon before him. As David entered he looked up, greeted him casually, and went on with the serving of the breakfast as if nothing at all had happened to disturb their relations.

In an obscure way the boy began to realise that people do go on like that. He himself was going on. Life does not stop or change because the people who live it are troubled or disturbed. One's troubles are one's own troubles to be kept carefully out of other people's way. One just goes on. It is the compulsion of the race. David was young to be learning this essential lesson, but later on he found that he had learned it well.

Cousin Mattie, a little white and tired looking, had abated in no degree her usual manner. Neither had she accentuated it. She chattered as she always did about the neighbourhood affairs, inexhaustibly interested if not always interesting. Just now she was finishing a tale to which her silent audience had paid but scant attention.

"And when the doctor, Dr. Holtby it was, told her she couldn't get better," said Miss Mattie, "she raised herself up in bed and she—won't you have two lumps this morning, Angus?—she said, 'You just see if I can't!' —Davy dear, tuck in your napkin—and she did. Of course she was safe in saying so because her grandmother who had the second sight——"

"Mattie!"

"Well, Angus, you needn't believe in second sight if you don't want to—Davy, you are getting honey on your cuffs—but I never can see why second sight may not be right as well as wrong. Anyway her grandmother's was. For no one can deny that she did get better. The doctor was so angry."

Leaving a pleasing vagueness as to whether it had been the grandmother or the recovery which had annoyed the doctor, Miss Mattie hurried out for more hot toast.

David carefully sucked the honey off his cuff. It was not a method of removal approved of by Miss Mattie but it served. Between sucks he stole glances at the big, silent man across the table. In some curious way, he seemed to be seeing him for the first time. Boys take fathers for granted, other men they observe. David was observing now and the result of his observations was a definite pang. Dimly, he felt that it would have meant much to be the son of Angus Greig.

He had always admired him. He admired him more than ever now. How fine he was, how strong, how dignified! David had known him to be hard, but never had he known him petty or mean. He was handsome, too, in his rugged way—broad of brow, with bristling eyebrows, large nose and firm, sensitive mouth. But it was in the eyes that the keynote of character lay. They were deep-set and steady, full of shadows and reserves; the eyes of an idealist and a dreamer.

David summed this all up under one comprehensive epithet. "Corking!" He murmured it under his breath. Yes, this hitherto father of his was very much a man.

With a sigh he applied himself to scone, wondering in his boyish way, why so altogether beautiful and wise a person as his mother had not preferred this father to—to the other one.

"David, I want you in the workshop?"

A not unusual command in a perfectly usual tone. Yet David jumped and spilled more honey. He made a frantic effort to answer with his normal, brisk carelessness and succeeded only in swallowing the wrong way with disastrous consequences. But for once no rebuke followed. Angus Greig seemed not to notice. The deep, blue eyes were absent, as if turned inward upon weightier matters.

"Finish your breakfast," added the carpenter kindly, as he left the room.

"Take a sip of water, Davy—quick!" Miss Mattie, returning with fresh toast, administered a smart slap between the shoulders. "Whatever made you choke like that? You haven't got a sore throat, have you?" anxiously.

David examined that organ cautiously. "N—o, I don't think so. But maybe it's kind of scratchy."

"Take some more honey," advised Miss Mattie promptly. It was characteristic of her that in matters of health she never suspected any one of guile.

The extra honey proved efficacious. A good way to eat honey is to suck it slowly and let it taste all the way down. David did this. It took some time. When he had quite finished, he showed symptoms of wanting to feed the cat.

But Miss Mattie had heard the parting injunction of Angus.

"Best not dawdle, Davy," she warned. "The cat can wait till you get back."

David never got over wondering how Cousin Mattie saw through his most plausible pretexts, except in regard to sore throat, toothache and things. He rose from the breakfast-table with a sigh.

The workshop to which he had been summoned was built at the back of the large garden which surrounded the house. It was a pleasant place. It was here that Angus Greig planned and made the beautiful things for which he had much more than a local reputation. He always called himself a carpenter, but he was in fact an artist using wood as a medium for the genius which inspired him. His carving was both rare and beautiful, highly prized (and priced) by the few discerning ones who eagerly purchased everything he made. Fame he might have had, had he cared for it. He might have called his work shop a "studio" and his masterpieces "creations." But Angus was too simple and sane to care for flippery like that. His agents declared that he had no ambition, and, as he never contradicted them, it may have been true. Perhaps the driving force which men call ambition had died in him with the death of her who had been the better part of his life. As it was, he took grave pleasure in his work. His great hands loved the tools they used with such amazing lightness and skill. In the beauty he created he found a certain happiness and healing.

Yet there were some, who having known him as a young man, shook their heads in disappointment and whispered, "A wasted life."

David loved the workshop. It had dusty, sunny windows, littered benches and sharp knives very useful for whittling. That the knives were forbidden lent them a joy peculiarly their own. There was also the clean, keen smell of cut wood, turpentine and polishes. There were glorious piles of curly, wiggly shavings, yellow as the sun, and there was something else. David did not know how to define the something else. But it was there and it charmed him. Had the workshop been a studio it might have been called "atmosphere."

Delectable as the place was, David would have shunned it to-day had he dared. When he came in, the carpenter was busy upon an exquisite panel. He did not look up. David sat down and watched him. He knew better than to interrupt. Angus believed that the young should cultivate patience. But to-day David had not long to wait. Almost at once the carver laid down his tool. Then turning his straight unhurried glance upon the boy he began without preliminaries.

"Your Cousin Mattie tells me that I was too sudden with you yesterday, my lad. No doubt I was. I had a thing to say and I had to say it shortly and as best I could. It's over. We'll speak no more of it. But there is another thing I've been considering. How would you like to go away to school, David?"

"It's Saturday!" said the boy in surprise.

"I'm not speaking of school here, I am speaking of a boy's school away from Milhampton altogether. It would be a complete change and would give you new interests. What I wish to know is, would you like it?"

David had been taught not to decide quickly. So, although he knew at once what he would say, he waited a moment and, as he waited, the magnitude of the proposition began to dawn upon him. To go away to school, to boarding school, like Jimmy Todd the minister's son? Was it likely any boy would hesitate in the face of such a glory? Yet his Scottish thrift stood appalled.

"It would be a great expense?" he ventured cautiously.

The carpenter permitted himself one of his infrequent smiles.

"That aspect of the case has been considered," he said dryly.

"Then I'd like to go. It would be—corking." It was unfortunate but David couldn't think of any more acceptable word.

Angus let it pass. "You see," he went on, "it's not so much an expense as an investment. You put in your time and your money and you take out—your future. Besides, there is that which justifies the expenditure. You have money of your own, David."

Fiery red flamed in the boy's cheek, his hands clenched themselves.

"*No!*" he said. It was at once a repudiation and an appeal.

For an instant the carpenter was puzzled. Then, meeting the reproach of the boy's look, his own grew very kind.

"Yes," he said. "It's your own money. It was your grandfather's before you. Honourable money, my lad, the fruit of the earth he tilled. You can be proud of your grandfather. When he died the farm was sold and the proceeds invested for your use. If your wish is towards schooling there are ample means."

The boy nodded. After his outburst he was too shy to speak.

"That's settled then. I have made inquiry and have decided on a school in Toronto. Dr. Barton is the head of it. It is very well spoken of and the Doctor himself is a man I can trust. He is a good man and a gentleman. The course there will fit you for the university. I rather envy you the university, David. I never had the benefit of it myself. I hope" a trifle more sternly, "that you will appreciate its advantages."

"Yes, sir." David's tone had awe in it.

Angus Greig picked up his tool again. He had said all that was necessary. The interview was over. David was free to go. But he did not go. He sat and swung his legs although he had been told often enough that swinging the legs is a detestable habit.

"You will not be permitted to fidget like that at Dr Barton's Academy," said Angus mildly.

David stopped fidgeting. He would have stopped anyway because his attention was arrested by something new in the other's manner. What was it? He could hardly say, but surely there was a slackening somewhere, a note of wider freedom, of better understanding—whatever it was it was grateful to the boy's strained nerves.

He jumped down from his bench and opened his lips to speak. But his Adam's apple wouldn't let him. It popped into his throat in a most annoying way. Yet he could not go until he had said something. There was a matter, a vital matter still unsettled between them.

At last he forced the Adam's apple down.

"I don't know," he stammered, "I—I want to know—what am I going to call you now?"

The thrill in the boyish voice went straight to the heart of Angus Greig as he bent above his panel. It lingered there, sweet and satisfying. Yet he did no more than raise his eyes to the shy, defiant eyes that questioned him. And he answered them as man to man.

"My lad, that is for you to say. But I know well what I'd like you to call me, David."

David knew, too. In that look, a veil was dropped from between them. They both understood.

"Thank you, father," said David.

Then, whistling, he ran away to feed the cat.

V

A GROWN-UP, starting upon an exploring trip through Darkest Africa, may have various preparations to make, but surely they are nothing like so many or so various as those necessary to a small boy who is starting off for school. David's days, long as they were, seemed far too short to contain the things which must be done.

First of all there were the three pups of Sheila the Scotch terrier to prepare for a long farewell and a new settlement in life. Then there were the two lop-eared rabbits, a pair of domesticated guinea-pigs with markedly Rooseveltian principles, and a Russian rat. Cousin Mattie, in the first flush of her concern over David's departure, had heroically offered to keep this menagerie intact, but Angus frowned on her heroism and David doubted its expediency. No mere woman, he felt, could properly understand a Russian rat or be expected to view with equanimity the inevitable multiplicity of guinea-pigs.

So in those days, David became a bearer of gifts and achieved a popularity among his kind which was brief but dazzling.

Then there were teeth to be attended to. This was of course highly unnecessary and a transparent device of grown-ups to spoil as much spare time as possible. As if teeth which could crack a hickory nut were not good enough for all practical purposes? There were lost moments also when he had to stand quite still while Cousin Mattie measured him for shirts. But these were partly compensated for by a golden hour when his first "store" suits came home. Beautiful suits they were with a pronounced front and back to the trousers and blue braces. There were knickers, too, that held on by a belt; and a knitted cap and sweater.

David tried hard not to be proud, or rather not to show how proud he was. But the attempt was not a conspicuous success. His brief popularity as a boy-about-town faded. Upon the Sunday, when he attended church in all his glory, not a boy in his set that did not cut him. There were the girls, of course; one could read admiration in their wondering glances, but David did not care for girls. The little girl with the red hair was not in church. Not that David cared for her either, but he couldn't help realising that she had missed something by staying home. So strongly did he feel this that he went so far as to walk around by the Widow Ridley's house after Sunday-school. There was no one in the front garden: he peeped through the back gate—nobody in the back-yard! Girls are silly things anyway!

This being the case it must have been pure altruism which caused David to ask at Sunday supper if Cousin Mattie had heard of anything being wrong "up there at that big house with the cedars."

Miss Mattie was always flattered when asked for information with regard to her neighbours, near or remote, but she had little to report concerning the household at the Widow Ridley's. There was nothing wrong that she knew of except what naturally would be wrong when a cranky old woman is allowed to badger the lives out of two orphan girls. Why did David want to know?

David didn't want to know. He had only asked. Couldn't a fellow ask a simple question?

"If they were poor people," went on Miss Mattie, discerning his interest behind his denial of it, "the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children would take those girls away from that old harriden. But she's rich, so no one says anything. I suppose people think that the money she may leave them when she dies will make up for everything. But she won't leave them any money, you mark my words."

"Why won't she?" asked David.

"Because they never do."

"But why don't they ever do?"

Miss Mattie shook her head. There was no reason. They just didn't.

David felt quite excited over this. He wondered if the red-haired girl knew of this peculiarity. If not, she ought to be told. He himself, ought to tell her. He would if he had time.

But the days flew by and he didn't have time. Twice the guinea-pigs came back on his hands owing to prejudices regarding the birth-rate. The Russian rat got homesick and had to have daily visits to keep its spirits up. One of the pups died and David had to fight the owner who had been guilty of criminal carelessness in the matter of meat. It took simply ages to visit all his old haunts, to say good-bye to swimming-pool and fish-pond and to prepare and make secure a certain "cache" of great value and mystery.

Through it all, he went about in a fear of Last Words. On account of this fear he kept out of the house most of the time and was taciturn to a degree when in it. But to his ever increasing surprise, Cousin Mattie stitched his shirts and said very little. The reason for this was not made plain until the very last day when she solemnly put into his hand a small note-book bound in black leather and secured with an elastic band.

"You have been so busy, Davy dear (was there a faint reproach in her voice?), that I have not been able to say those things to you that I would have liked. So I have written them all down. The first half of this little book is 'Don't,' and the second half is 'Do.'" Faint pride warmed Miss Mattie's tone. "You see I have arranged them all in alphabetical order, so you may turn to any advice you need without trouble or loss of time. I think I have provided for everything, and I have worded it all plainly. For instance, the first 'Don't' is 'Don't answer back.' That means your teachers, dear, of course. You may sometimes be justified in answering back a fellow pupil. But the subject is carried further under the 'F's,' as 'Don't fight.'

"The first 'Do' is 'Do answer letters.' That, I hope, is unnecessary, but I put it in because I did not have another 'A' to begin with. There are plenty of 'B's' and the 'C's' are also quite numerous. The very important ones, such as 'Do wear rubbers,' and 'Don't forget your neck and ears,' I have underlined."

Here Miss Mattie became so agitated that her further remarks were smothered in the genuine hug with which David received the gift. Something warm and sweet bubbled up in the small boy's heart as he felt her tears upon his face. His shyness and reserve melted. He forgot his newly acquired dignity. He forgot everything save that he loved her and he was going away.

"You—you won't forget me, Davy dear?"

Was there any chance of that? David's kisses, wet and eager, David's warm young arms about her neck told her far better than his mumbled words that there was no chance at all.

"And it will be so lovely to have you home for the holidays!" said Miss Mattie with her incurable optimism.

After the excitement of having his luggage called for by the baggage man and helping to lift it on himself, the walk to the station was all that was left. Miss Mattie did not come. She was afraid she might cry on the platform and she knew her boy wouldn't like that. Besides, Angus might wish to say something to David, privately. With Angus one never knew!

David had thought of this possibility himself and a fortnight ago he would have dreaded it. But now the prospect was quite bearable. Something had broken down between the man and the boy. Something which nothing was ever to raise up again, not years, nor separation, nor the lack of facile speech.

"We'll be looking to you to do good work, David. You will do your best?"

David hoped that he would.

"You will not fight more than you may find necessary?"

David hoped not.

"When you have to fight," said Angus, "be sure you're right and then hit hard—Hit hard anyway!" he added grimly.

"Sure," agreed David contentedly.

"And don't use slang!" sternly, "use the language of your forefathers and be proud of it."

"Su—yes, sir."

They were getting near the station now. The carpenter's step grew slower. His rare smile came as he glanced at the boy's face.

"David," he said, "you're a little afraid I'm going to preach to you. But I'm not. Who can tell what counsel you will need—until you need it? If you care to come to me then, I'll give you the best I have—and you probably won't take it. There's just one thing you'll need now and all the time. That thing is courage. Fear is of the devil. Resist it and it will flee from you." The carpenter's deep, blue eyes grew dreamy. "Be master in your House of Life. The man with the courage of his best beliefs is the man the world is needing, David.

Grapple with life, and do not let it go except it bless you."

David listened dutifully, wondering, but not excessively impressed. (Of course he would be brave. He would be a cowardy-custard if he weren't.) He was too young to know that Angus was coveting for him that future of valiant leadership which his own life, withdrawn from the conflict, had put aside.

There was no time for leave-taking at the station. They had scarcely stepped upon the platform when the Toronto train whistled rounding the curve. Its stay in Milhampton was very brief, only a moment's pausing of its whirring wheels. David felt himself swung upon the steps, felt the handgrip and—yes, surely—a kiss upon his forehead! His suit case was handed up. Next moment a glorious being in blue with gold buttons waved a lordly hand and the train was moving.

From the window, David saw in an excited blur, the familiar station, the long, board platform, the line of cabs and busses, the faces of people he knew, his father's face! Then Milhampton and all his former life vanished into the past which lies waiting for everything.

He was off into the unknown.

VI

WE have shown, I think, that it was hardly David's fault that he did not return to the garden. He cannot be held responsible for the fact that Life, after loafing carelessly along for twelve years, had suddenly bethought herself and become quite out of breath and red in the face with fussing over his small affairs.

Rosme knew nothing of all this. She knew only that her playmate had vanished into the mystery from which he had emerged. Many days she waited for him, every day deciding that she would wait no longer. Then gradually the waiting dwindled and became mere remembrance.

Things were happening to Rosme too.

Aunt came downstairs. After that there was little time to think of pirates. Once more the indomitable old lady had discomfited the prophets and the tap-tapping of her stick and the shrill sound of her voice seemed to penetrate every corner of Rosme's universe. Frances, on whom fell most of the burden, went about the house white-faced and silent; trying continually to please yet never pleasing; spending all her youthful strength in the thankless service of selfish, bitter old age.

The cook had left and the charwoman had given her periodical notice. A notice which, being a really kind-hearted charwoman, she always took back.

"Sorry Oi am to be lavin' you, Miss Frances," said Mrs. Maloney, "but it's lavin' this time Oi am for shure. The old woman is more than flesh and blood can stand. Grudges me my cup of tay, she does, and ivery penny counted twice over as if 'twas gold. And the tongue of her! Bedad, it's not even a dacent, Irish tongue at that!"

Mrs. Maloney adjusted her proper black bonnet and tied the strings with a strangling jerk.

"Aren't you afraid you'll choke yourself, Mrs. Maloney?" asked Rosme with real interest. "And is an Irish tongue different from other kinds?"

"It is that! Maloney himself is that handy with his tongue, 'twould surprise you. But, bless you, there's niver a bit of vice behind it! Knock you down would Maloney as quick as look at you and no hard feelin' before nor after."

"Could Maloney knock Aunt down?"

"He could indade," said Mrs. Maloney cautiously, "if 'twasn't for the poolice."

Rosme nodded. She understood from previous conversations that Mr. Maloney was accustomed to being thwarted by the police. She had long taken a great interest in his career. As set forth by his admiring spouse, it was the career of a worthy man much "put upon" by fate. Rosme appreciated this point of view. She had a genius for such appreciations; possessed, in fact, an almost uncanny aptitude for putting herself in other people's places. People, just as people, fascinated Rosme. She was fascinated even by Aunt and this is probably why the years of bondage were not so hard on her as on her less imaginative cousin. No matter what Aunt did, Rosme was inexhaustibly curious as to what she might do next. Thus was expectation constantly renewed.

"You see," she explained to Frances after a particularly purple outburst, "it is so exciting. When she gets so terribly mad, she might *burst!*"

Few visitors called upon the Widow Ridley and, had she been as poor as she was disagreeable, there would have been still fewer. One cannot altogether ignore money. There was the church, for instance. The Widow Ridley was a pillar in the church. She might almost be called the main pillar, speaking from a human point of view. She rented a pew and she sat in it. She gave a "weekly envelope" larger than any other three weekly envelopes put together. In times of stress she could be depended upon for a satisfactory subscription. Why this was so, no one knew. It was a genuine puzzle. To ascribe it to a Christian spirit was so unlikely as to seem merely absurd. What she gave, she gave bitterly and with revilings.

She called the minister a hypocrite and the board of managers, numbskulls. She called the Ladies' Aid a lot of tattling old women and the Missionary Society a set of meddling fools. Yet the treasurer's annual report invariably mentioned her in terms of respect and appreciation as "Our generous friend and fellow worker, Mrs. Mortimer Ridley." Also it would have been a breach of established policy not to ask her to take part in any suitable public function, such as distributing New Testaments to those Sunday School pupils who could recite all the commandments including the Eleventh: "That ye love one another."

The very corner-stone of the church in which she sat had been laid by her. The amount of her subscription had demanded it. True, there had been an Elder who objected. But the matter was hushed up. If an old lady, perfectly respectable and very wealthy, cannot lay the corner-stone of God's house without remarks being made, what are church finances coming to? Besides, as the minister said to the objecting Elder, "Are we all quite perfect ourselves?"

With this, perhaps hardly called for, explanation, it will be seen why there were still visitors to ring the bell at the Widow Ridley's front door. The Ladies' Aid undertook it as a duty which they owed to the church. They were wont to declare among themselves that they didn't mind the old lady's bitter tongue in the least. Neither they did. They rather enjoyed it—as long as they could keep it off themselves. It was from one of these duty-visitors that Rosme learned that David-of-the-garden had gone away to school. Aunt was being approached in the matter of a larger subscription towards the mortgage interest, and Rosme, interested as ever, was hidden in a deep seated chair, supposedly reading.

"I can't tell you just why it is," said the visitor, who was no less a personage than Mrs. Elder Robinson, "but our voluntary offerings, my dear Mrs. Ridley, are certainly decreasing. Why this should be so with our nice, new church, our choir and our eloquent minister is really a puzzle. Some few have stopped giving altogether, and many have cut down their amounts. As our minister said to me only yesterday, there is a sad growth of luxuries amongst us. The Pattersons are paying monthly instalments on a new piano. The Reeds give their children dancing lessons, and now I hear that Angus Greig, the carpenter, is sending that boy of his away to school in Toronto. As if his boy needed better schooling than yours or mine!"

"I haven't got one," said Aunt sourly.

"No—er—of course not. But the principle is the same. One wonders what we are coming to. Such foolish extravagance!"

This sentiment ought certainly to have pleased the Widow Ridley, but it was one of Aunt's charming little eccentricities to disagree with everything quite irrespective of her own opinion.

"Why shouldn't he send the boy to school if he wants to?" she rapped out.

"Well, yes, of course. Only—a carpenter, you know? And it is not as if the boy were his own son either. An adopted boy is different. Although——"

There was a pregnant silence after the "although"! A silence quite vocal to the sharp-witted old lady. Her answer to it was an audible sniff.

"Well, there's nothing in that," she said grudgingly, torn between her desire to give weight to a slander and her normal disposition to contradict everything. "The boy's not Angus Greig's son, nor any kin to him. He's that Dr. Thingamajig's son all right—I forget the name. Sorry to disappoint you."

Mrs. Robinson was playfully shocked. Disappoint? Such an idea! One was always so truly thankful to know that such a story had no foundation. But things do get about so. And sending the boy to school seemed just a little strange! Education was a good thing, of course, but the working classes were apt to lose a sense of proportion. It made one fear for the country at large. For if every Tom, Dick and Harry were to get expensive educations where would all our social distinctions be? It looked as if we might find ourselves in a rag-bag presently.

Aunt chuckled. She was quite certain, she said, that this was exactly what was going to happen. Not "presently," but very much sooner. "And some of us won't even make good rags!" she added in a tone which perceptibly hastened her visitor's departure.

Rosme rose and slipped away while Mrs. Robinson was putting on her gloves. Besides the back garden there was one place where she could always hide when she wished to be alone. This refuge was no less a place than the "best" rooms across the hall. These rooms, called by Aunt, "my drawing-rooms" were of the same size and shape as the parlours but their state in life was very different. These were the holy of holies, shrines to be approached with reverence on high days and even then glimpsed at only under shroudings of brown holland. Here the grate fires were never lighted on account of dust and the blinds were never fully raised on account of sun. There was incense in the atmosphere,—potpourri, moth-balls and the scent of richness. Rosme knew and loved this smell. It belonged to the closed rooms and the closed rooms belonged to her. They belonged to her because she alone enjoyed them. No one else ever came near them save with duster and broom.

So absolutely did they dwell in the land of the forbidden that even Aunt, who believed in all wickedness, had never suspected any one of violating their sacred gloom. Rosme was as safe there as if she had passed into the fourth dimension. The heavy door opened. It closed without a sound. The scent of old roses and camphor stirred to meet her. Stray sunbeams bursting through chinks in the shutters, danced through the pendant crystals of the old fashioned chandelier to bury themselves, rainbow hued, in the depths of the long mirrors on the wall.

Into this dim and scented stillness, the child advanced. All the mirrors knew her. They had caught and held reflections of her in every attitude and in every mood. She danced into them, peered into them, blew kisses into them, and then, turning, ran far, far into them until she was a small, dim elfish figure almost lost in their long perspective.

Often, when this part of her life was over, Rosme used to wonder if these rooms had been really beautiful. Reluctantly she admitted that they had probably been only rich; she had been saved from perceiving this by the virtue of her own imagination and the twilight in which they dwelt. The carpets were heavy and soft.

The satin brocade of the window hangings fell from wide cornices of gilt. The tall mirrors were framed in gilt, with marble shelves to rest upon. The fire-place mantles were marble with brass railings round the hearths. Marble also were the tops of the tables with carved legs. There were no bookcases and few books. What few there were, like the pictures on the walls, made up in size what they lacked in subject. Ornaments of various kinds were disposed in various places and their places were never changed.

From the centre of the ceiling, and dominating everything, hung the round, brass chandelier with the crystal pendants. These crystals were very wonderful. They were alive. They laughed and sparkled and danced. All they needed was a stray sunbeam. Rosme never tired of them; they were, in their evanescent and rainbow splendour, complete and satisfying.

Beside the pendants, the things she loved best in the rooms were the two small statuettes which stood on either end of the front mantle. One of these was called "Father's Return" and represented a domestic group of five with an old-fashioned, hooded cradle in the foreground. Over this cradle leaned the mother, a gracious figure in peasant dress. The neck of the homely blouse was unfastened showing the curve of a swelling bosom. She was smiling as she stooped to lift the fat and kicking baby from its pillow. In the background stood the father, cap in hand and spade still upon his shoulder. He, too, was smiling and looking with somewhat fatuous delight toward the cradle; while in appropriate attitudes of joy a small boy and girl danced beside him.

Rosme often looked long at this group. But she never looked further than the face of the bending mother. The children she found tiresome, the baby fat and foolish, the father a clod. But the mother! Perhaps the artist had really caught some inspiration as he moulded that gentle face. Perhaps Rosme read her own inspiration into it. At any rate it pictured for her something of the mother love which she herself had missed. At times she could almost fancy that the calm face stirred, lifted, and turned on her that hidden smile. At other times the fat baby in the cradle had it all. Rosme felt that if smashing the baby would have helped she would cheerfully have smashed it—and the children and the father, too!

The other statuette was quite different and one wondered how it came to be in the room at all. It was a figure of Joan of Arc, facing her accusers. The accusers were not there, but one sensed them from the Maid's look and attitude of proud defiance. She stood, drawn up to her full height, with one hand resting on a bar behind her, the other clenched and hanging by her side. The artist who conceived her had given life to a noble thing. As she stood there she was all womanhood arrayed against the evil which would drag her down. She was Purity; she was Courage; she was everything to soften and to steel the heart!

Rosme had thrilled at the first glimpse of her. Nor had she rested until she knew all that was known (in Milhampton) of her tragic story. Then she loved and worshipped her wholly.

Often she looked from the bending face of the mother to the lifted face of the Maid and strange thoughts stirred in her childish heart: How could two women be so lovely and so different? Her own position as regards their conflicting ideals was composite. She was content to frame it as follows: "I should like to *have* a mother but I should like to *be* a Maid."

She discussed her problems with both of them impartially. And to-day, the day of Mrs. Robinson's visit, she had a brand new problem to discuss. It was no less than the idea of a made-over world—a world which would put Aunt and Mrs. Robinson in the rag-bag. It was very interesting. Indeed it was from this moment that Rosme dated her awakened interest in the composition of the social fabric. Hitherto, much as she had deprecated certain things, it had not occurred to her that they were humanly changeable. Now she perceived a possibility of improvement. A world which would put Aunt in the rag-bag would be a better world, she felt sure. And the force which was going to do this was education. Not the kind of education that she was getting but the superior kind which boys like David-of-the-garden (Tom, Dick, and Harry boys) were going to school to get.

One is either born a snob, or one isn't. Rosme was not. She had not missed the note of patronage in the voice of Mrs. Robinson when she spoke of David's father as a carpenter. Neither could she know how laughable such patronage was. But she had noted its existence as a curiosity merely. It was one of those things which she found interesting but did not quite understand. It caused her to class Mrs. Robinson with Mary, Aunt's last cook but one. Mary had had the class instinct very strongly developed. She was an English girl, once under-housemaid in a great house and quite out of her element in Canada. Through her, Rosme had made an exhaustive study of the feudal spirit, and she had heard Mary speak many times of the second-under-housemaid in exactly the tone used by Mrs. Robinson in speaking of Angus Greig. Also she had heard Mrs. Robinson refer to Mrs. Blake Stewart with just that touch of awe which was natural to Mary in speaking of the King and Queen. So it was all of a piece. Only that Mary seemed much the more simple and sincere.

Mary left suddenly, as all Aunt's cooks did, and Rosme's studies in feudal psychology were abruptly terminated. But her conclusions, as confided to Frances, were not inapt. "Mary was a nice girl," she said, "and it wasn't because she didn't think well of herself that made her like that. She just really believed that her lords and ladies were a different sort of people altogether. The tears would come in her eyes sometimes when she talked about the Royal Family. Perhaps it's rather nice to feel like that, but I couldn't—unless it was some one like Queen Elizabeth."

Rosme thought of Mary now, and wondered if when the new order of things came in, her lords and ladies would follow Aunt into the rag-bag? Or would only part of them go in? And how dreadfully Mary would feel it, if it ever happened.

Just here the clang of the garden gate interrupted her musings. It was a mean gate. It looked as if it would shut quietly but it always clanged. And then Aunt heard the clang. It was as bad as an alarm bell.

Rosme peeped through the window shutter. The visitor was young Dr. Holtby and from the look on his face Rosme felt sure that he was saying things about the gate. Dr. Holtby was old Dr. Walker's assistant and he had been wont to drop in occasionally to report on Aunt. Lately he had been dropping in more than occasionally and his attentions to Aunt had been negligible. It was Frances whom he came to see. Rosme knew it, all Milhampton knew it, and, of course, Frances. But so far, by special miracle, Aunt did not know it. Therefore it was particularly provoking of the gate to bang.

Instantly, Aunt's harsh voice was heard from the top of the staircase.

"Frances, go to the door! There's that young Dr. Holtby again. Tell him I won't see him. And he needn't put his visit in the bill for I won't pay it. Tell him when I want him I'll send for him. And tell him to shut the gate: Frances—tell him to shut the gate!"

Rosme heard Frances' light step hurry along the hall, followed by the fateful tap-tap of Aunt's cane as she came downstairs. The child hesitated a moment and then, considering that she might be needed, she slipped out at the farthest door. When Aunt entered the parlour, Rosme was already there looking out of the window. She could see Frances and the doctor talking on the veranda. Frances' colour was high and the doctor looked both amused and angry.

"Is that young man gone yet?" demanded Aunt.

Rosme, drumming on the sill, pretended she did not hear.

"Frances!" called Aunt, rapping impatiently.

"She can't hear you, the door is closed," informed Rosme. "The doctor is giving her some beautiful flowers."

Aunt sniffed.

"He needn't. I have no use for his flowers. Let him bring my medcine when I need it and my bill when he must: that's all I ask of him. Flowers indeed!"

"Perhaps they are for me?" suggested Rosme innocently.

A snort was the only reply to this.

The doctor was taking his dismissal gracefully. He raised his hat, smiled ruefully and departed. Frances came back through the hall. She came very slowly. A perfect torrent of taps failed to hasten her steps. She appeared not to have heard them for when she entered the parlour her face was delicately flushed and smiling. She held the flowers in her hands.

"Throw them away!" commanded Aunt promptly.

"The man must be a perfect idiot. I don't want his flowers. I won't have them! Throw them away!"

The flush faded from the girl's face.

"They are mine," she said, "Dr. Holtby brought them for me."

"Did he indeed? No doubt he came to see you also?"

Rosme coughed loudly. She hoped Frances would have sense enough to say nothing. But there was a strange look about Frances to-day. She looked strung up.

"He did come to see me," she answered steadily.

There was a moment's awful pause. No doubt it was a pause of illumination. Then Aunt laughed.

Rosme clenched her small fists. She always wanted to hit out when she heard that laugh. It gave her murderous impulses. It made her feel sick. The thought of it sometimes made her hush her own bell-like laughter because in name it was kin to this horrid sound. To-day it was worse than usual. Frances winced and grew pale.

"That's it, is it?" croaked the old woman. "Very pleasant, I'm sure, and charged no doubt in the bill. I see. I see. So it's you he's after, is it, my girl? A whey-faced piece like you? Very likely! Of course he has no idea of the money—the money he thinks you'll have some day!" She laughed again. "Better tell him, my fine lady, that he won't die rich on that!"

Frances said nothing. She stared at her tormentor as if fascinated. Aunt continued.

"Don't stand there and stare at me! I mean what I say. Let me hear any talk of marrying and not one penny of my money do you get. What do you think you're here for? Why did I take you in when you hadn't a roof to your head? Why did I give you food to eat and clothes to wear—yes, and pay your povertystricken father's debts? Did I do it to have you marry the first numbskull that asks you just when you're beginning to be of use? Fine gratitude you show to me who might have left you to die in a charity home."

The flowers were slipping from Frances' loosened hands.

"It might have been kinder if you had."

Again Aunt laughed. She appeared to be enjoying herself. And Rosme decided that she had enjoyed herself quite long enough. Deliberately she leaned over to the small table by the window on which stood a very ugly, very valuable vase. A vase which was the pride of Aunt's heart. One push from a small, brown hand and it lay in fragments on the floor.

The intervention was quite too perfect!

With the cry of an enraged animal Aunt sprang at the child. With raised cane she struck at her. Rosme dodged the full force of the blow, only to receive its stunning impact on her thin shoulder. Again the frantic woman raised the cane but this time it was caught and wrenched from her hold by strong, young hands. Frances' flowers lay scattered on the floor but Frances herself had stepped into womanhood.

"Don't dare—don't dare to touch her!" It was a Frances who had forgotten fear who spoke. "Don't dare to lay a finger on her. Go back to your chair and behave yourself—or all the town shall know how you treat a motherless child! Rosme, Rosme darling, are you hurt?"

It was Rosme's first impulse to say that she wasn't hurt. But she bethought herself in time to seize a perfectly good opportunity.

"I—I'm not sure!" she murmured weakly, "but I think you had better call the doctor back."

VII

THIS little episode, designated by Rosme as the "Turning of the Worm," made a distinct difference in the lives of the two girls. To be a bully is to be a coward, almost always. Aunt, in her essence, was cowardly, and something in the white heat of Frances as she had turned upon her had warned the old lady that she had gone about as far as it was safe to go.

Her demeanour to Frances changed. She scolded less. She interfered less. The atmosphere of turmoil was replaced by one of comparative, yet ominous, calm. The old woman, feeling the reins of power slipping from her hands, began to watch with silent venom the slave who had so unexpectedly declared for freedom. She had never loved Frances. The girl's natural docility and uncomplaining service had never touched her selfish heart. She had despised her as a weakling, now she feared her for a sign of strength. Hitherto she had not troubled to actively dislike her, as she disliked Rosme; now a swift, sly hate began to grow.

She no longer prohibited the visits of Dr. Holtby. She uttered no more threats of disinheritance, but often with a cruel gleam in her eyes she would look at Frances, waiting for her lover, and the girl would be startled from her day dream by the cackle of her hateful laugh.

Rosme, the interested, watched it all, but without too much anxiety. She did not see how hate, as causeless and ungrateful as Aunt's, could hurt Frances. She was at this stage blissfully unconscious of the power of mammon. If Aunt wished to leave her old money to some one else—let her! who cared? Frances didn't want her horrid old money anyway!

A sharp shock taught her her mistake on this point. Rosme found Frances one afternoon, white and breathless, in the room they shared, and, upon questioning, it came out that Frances was afraid. Frances did want Aunt's money!—some of it. Aunt had been particularly nasty and had said "something." Just what, Rosme did not learn, but the result was that Frances was almost sure that Aunt didn't intend to leave her any money at all.

"Well," said Rosme the valiant, "what if she doesn't?"

Frances said nothing but she looked at Rosme with dilated eyes.

"You don't want her old money, do you, Frances?"

"But—but Rosme, what could I *do?*"

There was no mistaking the note of real terror in the girl's voice. Rosme caught it at once and at once her own preconceived ideas began to veer. Frances went on in a low, breathless voice.

"You see, dear, I can't do anything; to support myself, I mean. I have not been taught. The girls who earn their own living are girls who have been trained. They go to business-college or take teacher's certificates, or—or learn trades like dressmaking and things—or nurses. I wanted to be a nurse. But Aunt wouldn't let me try. She said she didn't bring me up to nurse other people. I would have all I could do nursing her. And now—now if she leaves me without anything——"

Rosme, looking into Frances' frightened eyes, had the sense of looking over a precipice into unknown and unsuspected depths. She drew back with a little shiver.

"Aunt daren't!" she declared, stoutly.

"Yes, she dare. She cares a little now for what people think but she knows she won't care after she's dead.

Sometimes I think—I think that is what she laughs about!"

This was only too probable, but Rosme would not admit it.

"Mr. Burbage, the lawyer, wouldn't let her make a will like that," she said comfortingly. "You're all worked up, Frances. There's nothing to be afraid of, really. And anyway," with a happy inspiration, "you're forgetting Dr. Holtby."

A soft blush rose to Frances' cheek. The fear began to die out of her eyes. She had, in her sudden panic of helplessness, lost sight of the fact that she was no longer quite alone in the world.

Rosme noted the change with satisfaction. But, for herself, she felt far from satisfied. There might not have been a Dr. Holtby. What then? The indubitable fright of the older girl had opened the younger one's eyes. And Rosme's eyes, once opened, must probe the depths. Here was another aspect of that problem of the world and the rag-bag. It needed a lot of thinking over.

The first thing to do was to discover, if possible, Aunt's real intentions. This happened to be comparatively easy as Aunt had, that very day, sent for lawyer Burbage and they had remained closeted together for an ominous period. Rosme had her code of honour and, in its way, it was a strict one but it did not preclude judicious espionage during this visit. Her conclusion, arrived at from light but significant material, was that, in Frances' case, Aunt was going to be as bad as her word. The continual use of Frances' name and the indignation of the old lawyer was evidence of this. Also Aunt's voice raised in the declaration, "Well, if you won't do it, I'll get some one else who will," after which the lawyer's opposition sank into disapproving silence.

That same evening, as Frances sat with her serene face bent above some fancy work, waiting for the now welcome clang of the garden gate, Aunt had suddenly looked up from the evening paper and—laughed.

There was something so cruelly exultant in that laugh that Rosme thought at once, "It's done! She made old Burbage do it this afternoon!"

Frances pretended not to notice, bending still lower over her embroidery.

"I see that Dr. Hamilton has bought out a big practice in Kingston," said Aunt, amiably. "He'll go far, that young man. It takes money to get along these days. He knew that when he married Tom Butler's girl, and asked for a settlement before the wedding. He was too wise to run the risk of getting the maid without the money."

"Enid Butler is a very nice girl, and I'm sure he didn't marry her for her money," said Frances. She said it calmly, but Rosme, and doubtless Aunt, noticed that she had been clumsy enough to prick her finger.

"Yes, yes." Aunt seemed in high good humour. "Doubtless she thinks the same. They all do—stop that distracting noise!" This last, because Rosme, fearing for the fate of Frances' embroidery, had suddenly begun to play the piano with great vigour and industry.

That night Rosme wakened to see Frances sitting in the window seat in the moonlight. With her fair hair falling over her white night dress, she looked younger and more frail than usual.

"Francie."

"Yes, dear, I'm coming. I was just thinking," Rosme felt her shiver as she crept into bed. "Rosme, you don't think—you don't think he really would, do you?"

The point was cryptic and Rosme was half asleep.

"Who? Do what?" she inquired, yawning.

"Dr. Holtby—care about money? You don't think he would be—disappointed—if I didn't have any"

Rosme was fully awake now.

"He hadn't better be!" she cried belligerently, "why, Francie, dear, he wouldn't be *nice* if he were, would he? And you wouldn't like him if he weren't nice—like that?"

Frances began to cry quietly.

"I'm afraid I would!" she sobbed. "Oh Rosme, pray that he doesn't, for I can't stop liking him now!"

Here was another puzzle for Rosme. Why couldn't Frances stop liking Dr. Holtby if it turned out that he wasn't nice at all? Such a state of affairs seemed simply silly. One doesn't like horrid people except on Sunday in a kind of Bible way. Rosme was prepared to like even Aunt in a Bible way. But that way doesn't count. And it was certainly not the way in which Frances liked Dr. Holtby. Frances was getting queerer every day!

"If you're worrying about it," said Rosme in a commonsense tone, "why don't you tell him right out that Aunt isn't going to leave you any money. Then you'd know."

Frances lay still and buried her face in the pillow. Rosme felt her soft body grow more rigid.

"Will you?" she persisted. But Frances did not answer, and Rosme knew that the course which seemed so easy Frances would never take. She was afraid.

Rosme said no more, but putting a thin, comforting arm across the older girl's shoulder she lay there thinking, mightily puzzled, until she fell asleep.

VIII

ROSME was practising scales. The only time when scales are bearable is when they are the lesser of two evils. In Rosme's case Aunt was the other evil, so scales were quite welcome in comparison. Dr. Holtby, waiting for Frances and trying to shut his ears, did not understand this, so when the player ceased abruptly and whirled about on the piano stool he said "Thank Heaven!"

"Would you rather have had Aunt?" asked Rosme feelingly. "Didn't you hear her coming along the hall? She never comes in when I'm practising. That's why I practise so much. And anyway I wanted a chance of talking to you."

The doctor intimated that he was flattered.

"What I want to know is," she went on, "are you very fond of money?"

"Very," answered he, gravely.

Rosme frowned. "I can't see why," she said, "look at Aunt!"

"I would rather not," said the doctor pleasantly.

"Aunt has always had lots of money, and she's not a bit nice. Frances has never had any and she's as nice as can be."

The doctor admitted this.

"If Frances had a lot of money, it might spoil her," cautiously.

"Hum!" said the doctor.

"Do you think Frances will have lots of money?" asked the child directly.

The doctor was slightly disconcerted. He had, as a matter of fact, expected just that.

"Because she won't." Rosme was in for it now and forged ahead valiantly. "I thought you ought to know. I feel sure," politely, "that Frances would not like you to be disappointed. Aunt made a new will yesterday."

The doctor stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Did she?" he said at last.

"And she left Frances out."

"Why?" The question was out before he realised that he was questioning a child.

"Because she doesn't want her to get married."

"To me?" in genuine surprise.

"To anybody. She wants her to stay here and wait on her."

"Oh, I see." Then—"Pleasant old party!" he added ruefully.

In the silence which followed, they could hear Frances singing as she put on her hat. The slightly hard young face of the doctor softened. He forgot that he was worldly wise, that he was only an assistant with his way to make, that he had expected, not unnaturally, that some day the girl he married would be able to give him substantial help. His thoughts turned from himself to the girl upstairs. He had a swift vision of her, a bird in a cage, and only his hand to open the door. In that moment he knew that he loved her. A soft fire began to glow at his heart, a fire into which his half unconscious selfishness fell and perished.

"Well?" said Rosme.

He had forgotten Rosme for the moment. What an odd little creature she was!

"Do I gather," he said formally, "that you are asking me my intentions?"

Rosme caught the note of banter but her eyes remained serious.

The doctor smiled.

"Do you know," he said, "I don't believe I care so much for money as I thought I did. The respected Aunt may go—oh, here is Frances!"

Rosme watched the lovers depart with satisfaction. Frances need not cry at night any more. Frances was safe.

It was only too apparent, however, that this safety was the result of accident. It might just as well have happened the other way. The underlying problem remained unsolved. Rosme, looking over her cousin's shoulder, had glimpsed an abyss. She could not forget the glimpse.

"I will never be like that!" she told herself. All her virile, independent soul revolted at the prospect of resigning itself to the caprices of fate as represented by Aunt. She must in some way make some standing-ground of her own; gain some place of vantage from which she could negotiate.

But how to get it? Frances had said that girls who wanted to support themselves must be trained, and training was impossible without Aunt's consent. Besides she was too young. There remained the education which should come before the special training and which she was certainly not getting as things were. The education which Frances had received had already proved its uselessness.

She spoke of it to Mrs. Maloney one day and asked that lady's opinion. Mrs. Maloney thought that education all depended on what you wanted to do with it.

"I want to use it," said Rosme.

"Then governesses and things is no good. You'll have to be after gettin' certifagits," said Mrs. Maloney. "But what would you be wantin' with thim with your Aunt and all. Shure she'll be seein' that you have plenty."

"But if she didn't?"

Mrs. Maloney flicked a whisp of suds from her nose.

"Shure thin you'd be in the divil of a pickle, Miss Rosme," said she.

The child nodded.

"It's independence every young girl should be lookin' to," continued the charwoman. "Let thim stand on their own feet, says I. A girl's not safe unless. A bit of her own money in her pocket, and a bit of sinse in her head is what a girl needs to go straight. And if you think there's a chance of the old divil double crossin' you (I mane your Aunt, my dear, and excuse the langwidge) what I says is, don't give her the chance nor the satisfaction."

The result of all this was that Rosme presented herself before Pharaoh with a demand to depart out of Egypt. In other words she told Aunt that she wanted to go to the public schools.

"Do you indeed?" said Aunt with sarcastic mildness. "Well, you shan't. Sit down and compose yourself."

This was not in any way an invitation to be taken literally. It was merely one of Aunt's charming phrases and indicated refusal of the most final order. Rosme was well acquainted with it. She said nothing and left the room.

That afternoon she paid two visits. The first was to the office of Thomas Burbage, the lawyer. Lawyer Burbage was a benevolent looking man. He had a kind heart, under excellent control. That is to say, its kindness was never allowed to seriously interfere with business. Nevertheless old Mrs. Ridley and her latest will had worried him considerably. He had found Frances and Rosme Selwyn somewhat on his mind. Therefore he was not exactly pleased to see his visitor.

Rosme sat up straight and dignified in the middle of the big office chair. Her long black legs looked very thin, her small face under its floppy hat, which she wore with a curious French grace, was set and purposeful.

"Well, my little lady," said the lawyer in his heavy fatherly manner, "and what can I do for you?"

"You can make Aunt send me to school," said the little lady briefly.

"Bless me! Don't you go to school? Aren't you being educated?"

"Frances is teaching me but it isn't like going to school. I want to be able to get certificates and things."

"Whatever for?" asked the lawyer in surprise.

Rosme leaned forward, making a comprehensive gesture with her small fine hand. "Mrs. Maloney says that girls ought to be independent and I agree with her. Put a bit of money in a girl's pocket and a bit of sense in her head and she'll go straight."

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated the lawyer.

Rosme continued. "Tom, Dick and Harry are getting an education and presently we shall all be in the rag-bag. Very well, then—I want to go to school."

The lawyer drummed on the desk with his pencil and managed to suppress a smile. "The rag-bag, eh? Well, perhaps we shall. But in regard to yourself, my dear, surely your Aunt——"

Rosme pointed a slim finger.

"You made Aunt's will!" she said simply.

It was hard to embarrass Thomas Burbage but somehow that slim pointing finger affected him unpleasantly. Before he knew it he had blundered into an admission of its accusation.

"She may make a dozen more wills before she dies," he stammered.

"She may not," said the child.

The two looked at each other and it was the man's eyes which fell.

"Well, Miss Rosme," said he, after a moment's pause, "if you want to go to school I can't see why you shouldn't. I'll speak to your Aunt about it and do what I can. Though I'm afraid I have very little influence."

Rosme rose and shook out her short skirts.

"Aunt cares quite a bit for what people think," she said. "I am going now to see the minister and then I am going to see Mrs. Elder Robinson, and others."

"You are a strategist!" The lawyer surveyed her with amused admiration. "If Miss Frances had a little of your spirit——"

"Frances has her own kind of spirit," said Rosme coldly. "Thank you. Good afternoon."

The calls upon the minister and the wife of the chief elder were equally successful. Rosme managed to leave them both with a burning sense of injustice being done to a deserving child. This injustice they each felt it to be their duty to set right. It is always pleasant to set injustice right when some one else is the unjust party. It gives one a virtuous glow. Every one to whom Rosme spoke was quite willing to help.

So without understanding in the least what had happened, Aunt found herself pricked upon all sides by the pricks of adverse criticism. Why didn't she send Rosme Selwyn to school? It was absurd to think that her young cousin could educate her satisfactorily! School was the proper thing. It was the only decent thing, the only fair thing. It was the one thing which the opinion of society demanded. Puzzled and furious, but true to her instinct for saving appearances, Aunt gave in. Rosme was sent to the public schools.

The day consent was given, Rosme ran with her triumph to the closed room. The mother had no message for her to-day but surely the militant maid smiled approval! And, oh it was sweet, that first victory—the dawning sense of self-dependence!

The next summer, Frances married Dr. Holtby and Rosme passed, first of her class, into the Milhampton collegiate.

So she, too, set out into the untrodden land of youth.

BOOK II: MIST

I

LIFE and the attraction of life! Always until we find another force as mighty, will the big cities take their toll. The young, the eager, the hope-driven are hers for the asking. Like some great, heedless foster-mother she gathers them all, wanted and unwanted; using what she can, supremely careless of the rest. There is always room, for there is always growth. Life pours into her because of the life she holds.

Back in the country places and little towns Nature sits with puckered brow and wonders why her children leave her. "Am I not beautiful and bountiful and very kind?" she muses. "Do I not give my sons and daughters fresh untainted air and winds of morning? Do I not spread my skies with turquoise and pure gold, carpet my fields with emerald and dew my grass with diamonds? Do I not bring forth plentifully, tempting my own with fruits and seedlings? Yet the young who should sow my seed and eat of my fruit desert me for a barren heritage. Under curtains of smoke they sit: where they walk their pathways are of stone. They breathe poison and drink strange waters. What I have given they squander; what I would still give they disdain!"

So, for a while, neglected Nature muses and then, if still ignored, turns to her own purposes and forgets. The trees leaf, the streams run and all the growing things push upward whether one eye or a thousand be there to see. Only when left too long unhusbanded will Nature take her just revenge. Let man forsake her utterly and he finds himself forsaken. Life that will not live with her finds that without her there is no life. Left with no one but herself to care for, Nature will go back to the old ways, the ways she loves the best—the tangled vine, the matted wood, the long lush grass—all the waste, the riot and the beauty of the wild. Then man in his man-made cities will hunger and, hungering, will turn to her begging to be taken back, a son once more.

Such would be the logic of the case but it is logic which is never strictly tested. There are always those who stay behind. Our fields are sown, our harvests are brought in, our fruits are gathered. The city roars on, undisturbed, certain of being fed somehow, by some one. And still its hidden magic draws the young and the eager unto it—and always will!

So, with the passage of a few swift years, it is in the city that we look for David and, presently, for Rosme also. Frances and Miss Mattie and Angus Greig are of those who stay behind. . . .

Mrs. Carr's boarding-house on Arbutus Street was both comfortable and select. That is to say, the house was comfortable and Mrs. Carr was select. She was a frosty person with a grim eye. Her aspect was calm, her mouth tight and her nose suspicious. Long ago there had been a Mr. Carr but he had departed to a better world and left no traces. Perhaps he realised that Mrs. Carr had been intended by the discerning fates to be the widowed keeper of a select city boarding-house. Her eye alone had marked her out for this. It was a light blue eye, slightly prominent. The unworthy, the dubious, the soiled, the insolvent shrank from that eye. If the angel who guarded Eden had had an eye like that he would not have needed a drawn sword. This is why the boarding-house was as select as it was comfortable. No doubtful Adam or sinning Eve ever got past Mrs. Carr. No shadiness of any kind had she ever tolerated, no bad debts, no strugglers. Even the attics were tenanted by young gentlemen students of unquestioned solvency.

It was through one of these young gentlemen that David Greig was introduced at Mrs. Carr's. David was now in his fourth university year and it happened that he was temporarily without a boarding-house owing to his last landlady having been sold out. David's friend explained this to Mrs. Carr and spoke warmly in his favor as a possible boarder. David was, he declared with enthusiasm, "A good old scout though a bit nutty."

"Nutty?" Mrs. Carr wished to know in what way the young man was nutty.

"Oh, a kind of quiet chap. Not much pep. But the best ever. Messes around a bit—makes things, you know."

"Makes things! In his room?"

"Certainly in his room. He couldn't make 'em on the front veranda, could he?"

Frost spread a film over the prominent blue eyes. Their owner was sorry to turn away any friend of Mr. Fish but it hardly seemed as if this particular friend were entirely suited to a select establishment.

"Better see him anyway!" Mr. Fish was young and persistent. "I'll trot him around to-night."

Trot him around he did and with them trotted Miss Mattie who had come down to Toronto for this very purpose. She had gently insisted on having a voice in the choosing of David's new boarding-house, having been completely horrified by the last one. Left to himself she felt sure he would settle down in the first room which displayed a card and whose landlady seemed to need the money. Miss Mattie felt much sympathy for people who needed money but she was determined that they should not acquire it at the expense of David's meals. She had inspected Mrs. Carr's from the outside and she had liked the appearance of its curtains. A housekeeper who kept her curtains crisp and white like that *in the city* must be of the right sort. Nor were grim eyes and frosty aspect sufficient to change this opinion, for these things may belong to accident while crisp curtains belong to character.

"You say that the landlady may object to David's scientific experiments?" she said when David's friend had reported. "Don't worry at all about that. I shall arrange it. A little tact is all that is necessary."

The preliminary sparring was brief, for almost at once Miss Mattie had expressed herself as satisfied and asked to be shown the rooms.

Mrs. Carr replied that there were no rooms. There was one room only. A vacancy of any kind was most unusual.

"Then we will look at that room," smiled Cousin Mattie.

"I am very particular——" began Mrs. Carr.

Miss Mattie waved her hand graciously. "That is why we wish to see the room," she said. "If you will be so good——"

Mrs. Carr was so good. She did not seem able to be otherwise. Miss Mattie, in the pursuit of David's comfort, was something in the nature of an irresistible force. The vacant room was displayed and inspected. It was a large, light room built over the kitchen and looking out on the neatly kept back-garden. Miss Mattie sniffed delicately and wondered if the smell of dinner would interfere with David's appetite.

David said that it would be a good thing if something interfered with it but he had small hope. Besides he liked the room. He liked the bowed window looking out on the prim garden. He liked the fat black cat which walked along the fence and he liked being over the kitchen best of all, "for," he said, "they'll be making such a racket themselves that they won't mind if I do hammer a bit."

"Hammer!" The horror in Mrs. Carr's voice might well have quenched the boldest, but it had no effect at all upon Miss Mattie.

"So tactless of you, Davy dear!" she murmured, fingering the sheets to test their quality. Then, waving the tactless one out of the room, she turned her whole attention to the matter of negotiation.

When the ladies emerged shortly afterwards Miss Mattie, bright eyed and calm, announced victory. The room was engaged, the rate of board settled, various little improvements arranged for; permission to replace the double-bed by a small single one and to add a large and solid table, such a table as would permit of a small amount of hammering without danger to the room's furniture. It was also stipulated that there should be no explosions.

How David's cousin Mattie managed this I do not know. If I did I shouldn't be so foolish as to tell it in a book. Manage it she did and without any visible scars of conflict. Mrs. Carr also seemed unharmed though somewhat dazed. Her light, blue eyes focused themselves upon her newest boarder with an inquiring stare. A stare under which the newest boarder blushed and wished to goodness Cousin Mattie had let him choose his own boarding-house!

Yet had he known it, David Greig need not have been embarrassed by any woman's scrutiny. Mrs. Carr would have needed to deny her sex altogether if she had not warmed a little toward the fine upstanding young man who blushed so easily. David had never possessed the beauty of regular features, nor did he have it now but he had the fresh, clear skin of his boyhood without its freckles and he had eyes grey and dark with a sparkle like the gleam of sun on dark sea-water. Besides this there was already showing more than a hint of that power which we call personality—that marvel which, apart from any training or lack of it, singles a man out from all his million fellows. Some men have so little of it that they are lost indistinguishably in the mass, while for others it is as a two-edged sword forever dividing the way before them. Such men, whatever their trend, are likely to find themselves among the pathmakers of mankind.

But David was too young and too modest to think of pathmaking yet. He considered himself somewhat disappointing. He had made for himself no shining mark during his progress throngh school and university. He slipped through it all with an air of detachment which annoyed his masters exceedingly and was, to say the least, unusual in a university where nearly every one was placed and ticketed. To the oft-repeated question, "What are you going to *be?*" David had never yet returned any more satisfactory reply than "Oh, let a fellow learn a little first."

"All very well, Greig," remarked a professor loftily, "Only don't cast about too long. Remember the dog and the shadow."

"Sensible dog!" murmured David, "I always have admired him."

The only one whose expectations he feared to disappoint was Angus, and Angus, fortunately, was gifted with the patience of understanding. When, after some years of school life, he had come to him with a poor report and the shy statement, "I don't want to study, I want to make things," Angus had pooh-poohed his small rebellion. He had pointed out that the study comes first, the making after. And with much insight he had tried to find out just what it was that David wanted to make. But David couldn't tell him much except that he wanted to make "something new."

"You would like to be an inventor, David?" he asked gravely, and the boy's sudden blush told him that he had said the magic word.

The ambition had grown with David's growth, but at the time of his initiation into the selectness of Mrs. Carr's establishment it was known only to Angus, though guessed at by Miss Mattie and Mr. William Carter Fish.

Mr. Fish was the friend who had introduced David to Mrs. Carr. He occupied the front attic and was known in the house and to his intimates outside as "Silly Billy" or "Fresh Fish." Mr. Fish had a warm heart and no head worth mentioning. Also he had the unique misfortune of looking like his name. "Fish" is hardly a name one would choose in any case but when it accompanies a wide and drooping mouth, inclined to open unexpectedly, and eyes a shade too far apart, its possession may well spell tragedy. Luckily, Billy was not built on tragic lines. The ragging of heartless students he took with equanimity. It was only when the equally heartless Fair participated that Billy was really hurt. For Billy adored the Fair. It was his occupation in life.

David, on the contrary, did not care for girls, neither did Billy care for "making things," hence each was free to bore the other to his heart's content. Friendship is a curious thing, there is a lot of good, healthy boredom connected with it. When Billy talked girls, David yawned and begged him to "come out of it." When David talked engines Billy closed his fishy eyes and frankly went to sleep. Or, if the exposition had been too impassioned to allow of slumber, he was always ready with some cooling remark such as "But you'll never be able to pull it off, old thing. Invention takes brains!"

David settled into the select atmosphere of Mrs. Carr's with scarcely a ripple. He was generally voted a nice young fellow. Miss Walker, a maiden lady of independent means who occupied the left front and was known as "pancake" on account of her extreme flatness, called him "dear boy." Mr. Worsnop, right front, who was middle-aged and "something in gas," referred to him as "that nice young Greig, so modest and unassuming, exactly what I used to be at his age."

"Got over it nicely, hasn't he?" whispered Mr. Martin to the next-at-table.

Mr. Martin had the room behind Mr. Worsnop. He was a smart young man. At present he was only a stenographer, but he hoped soon to be a private secretary to Some One, and one of these days, given decent luck, he hoped to be Some One himself. It was his opinion that David was a "superior young ass." At least that is what he told Miss Sims who, with her friend Miss Weeks, roomed across the hall and whose opinions (of other young men) Mr. Martin was trying to form.

"Is he?" said Miss Sims. She cast one glance at David under cover of her long, straight lashes and then she giggled.

"He *is* funny," agreed Mr. Martin. "I often feel like laughing when I look at him."

Miss Sims giggled again. Then she stopped giggling abruptly for the new boarder was looking her way and she had already possessed herself of the knowledge that he didn't admire giggles. Her room-mate, Miss Weeks, known as "Bunny" on account of an odd resemblance to a white rabbit, sighed openly and wished to goodness that old Icebox (Mrs. Carr) had seated Mr. Greig on her side of the table instead of in the far-off corner next to Pancake.

"She'll make him so sick with her 'dear boy' that he'll leave before any of the rest of us get a look in," she prophesied gloomily.

But David showed no signs of leaving. He didn't mind the "dear boy." He didn't mind anything very much. As a background, he found Mrs. Carr's very pleasant and interesting and in the foreground there was always his work—the most fascinating work in the fascinating world. Under his shy diffidence burned an eager fire—to find and to make, to analyse, to assemble, to create. To make new things out of old, to find lost secrets, to trail strange clues!

"What more, Billy," cried David glowing, "what more could a man possibly desire?—*nothing!*"

Mr. Fish, whose gentle slumbers over a text-book had been thus rudely interrupted, looked up with the amused tolerance of a seasoned wordling.

"What more?" he repeated, "what more?—Gadzooks—the infant asks *what more?*"

II

DAVID had been settled at Mrs. Carr's for almost a month when one morning he awoke with a tingling sense of the perfect rightness of everything. His first glance was for his work-table, a half hesitating glance as if he feared its solid proportions might have melted into nothingness over night. The sight of it sent a warm glow curling along his spine. Any one who has ever made a new thing will understand this glow. It is known as the joy of creation and is, perhaps, humanity's tiny share of the great Glow of God when, having made the world, he "saw that it was good."

David sat up and hugged his knees. Last night, working late, he had discovered something! It was a little thing, a tiny thing indeed, but what true inventor does not know the tremendous importance of the little? David knew very well that this small thing which he had found was as indispensable in the execution of his perfected scheme as the largest thing of all. More so indeed since it was the pivot on which the whole idea swung. Therefore he hugged his knees and felt extraordinarily happy.

He felt also very virtuous and this in spite of the fact that he had neglected every ordinary duty for the past week, lectures and letters home included. Even meals had been forgotten; this to the cold astonishment of Mrs. Carr. Many and varied kinds of boarders had she known but a boarder who did not eat the meals he paid for was, to use the words of Mr. Fish, "a new one on her." David wasn't sure whether he had had dinner last night or not, but in any case, to judge by his present feelings, he would be able to even things up at breakfast.

And in the meantime he would turn over and go to sleep again. But just as a reminder that no one sleeps to himself, a bang on the door was followed by the ungracefully hurried entrance of Mr. William Carter Fish. The disturber wore a green dressing-gown, which error of taste made him more startlingly like his name than ever, and, like Cinderella, had lost a slipper.

"Terribly narrow shave getting here!" panted he, "stepped on the squeaky board third step from top and old Icebox was out in a twinkling. Nearly had me spotted, by Jove! I don't believe that dashed woman ever sleeps! I could almost hear that frozen sherbert voice of hers, 'No dressing-gowns allowed in the corridors, Mr. Fish, *if* you please!' "

"Well, you see she has to consider the rest of us," said David—"oh, don't stint yourself, have another!" For in his agitation Mr. Fish had absent-mindedly appropriated a small handful of his host's best cigarettes.

"Thanks, I will. Say, David, old thing, are you specially nice this morning?"

"I'm not sure," said David cautiously. "It depends on what it is."

"Oh, it's nothing much, something very pleasant, really. It's a girl. No," hastily, as David disappeared into his pillow, "it's not the one you took last time. This one is much nicer. Girl you never saw before. Lovely creature. She wants to go to a show."

The submerged David raised a hand. "Take her," he permitted graciously.

"Yes, but—you see I'm taking another girl. And this girl has to come along—kind of a trailer. Staying there, duty to guest and all that. Now this other girl and me—well, it's important. You'll know what I mean when I tell you it's Mary Fox I'm taking. Now this other girl——"

"Nothing doing! Besides, the last time you spoke of Mary Fox you said you and she were definitely off."

"Yes, I know. So we were. But Mary didn't really mean it. Any way she said she would go to the show to-night if she could bring along this little friend. The friend's a peach, really. She's a kind of remarkable girl. Just the kind you like."

"Ever met her?"

"N—o. But she's the kind you don't have to meet in order to appreciate."

"Thanks. That *is* the kind I like. I'll do my appreciating at a distance. What I want to get next to is my breakfast. Vanish! And go canny on the stairs. You'll make a scandal in this house, yet."

"No, but Grieg—I say, David—you'll see a fellow through, won't you? You see I was so sure you would I just invited 'em. Don't you really want to meet a perfectly nice girl?"

Denial trembled on David's eyes and lips, but—after all he had earned a holiday: "What colour hair has she?" he asked thoughtfully.

"What kind do you like?"

"Red," said David, caught by the quickness of Billy's strategy.

"Well, that's what her's is. Red, brick-red! The reddest hair I ever saw—you have to wear green glasses as a protec——"

A well-aimed pillow smashed harmlessly against the door of his retreat, but a suppressed "Ouch!" from outside showed that the insulter had not escaped quite unscathed. Some one, with boots, had trodden upon his Cinderella toes.

Then the door, jammed by the fallen pillow, was pushed slowly open and the person with boots squeezed through. He proved to be a young man in a grey tweed suit. A very spic and span young man and so slender that he squeezed through easily.

"Come right in," said David, "don't mind me. I'm not up yet but the Kings of France always received in pyjamas. Did you come in with the milk? What's the row?"

"Person in a green dressing-gown got it's foot stepped on. As for the milk, if it has as hard a time getting in as I had, no wonder it turns sour. Truth is I didn't intend to be here for an hour yet. Beastly trick of that gay lad Matheson! Got hold of my watch last night and saved some daylight on it. I *thought* there was something wrong with the sun, but then, suns are so erratic. I say, that landlady of yours is the coldest thing since last Christmas. I gather she doesn't approve of saving daylight?"

David groaned. "Between you and Silly Billy I'll be turned out of this house. And it's the only decent place I've struck in years. You're not a bit welcome."

"Oh, I don't mind that," cheerfully, "what I really want are your notes on the yesterday lecture of old Moses. I was, ahem, unfortunately among those unable to be present."

David sat up. "I, also, was unavoidably absent," he said gravely.

"You? no—really? Then I'm done! But you, of all people. Who was she?"

"She—wasn't."

"No? Oh well, I'm not curious."

"It wasn't a girl, stupid. I was working."

"Oh yes, I forgot, you do work occasionally. Queer idea! What do you work at anyway? Is it over there on that table?"

David was out of bed in an instant.

"Hands off!" He shouted and so urgent was the note of warning in his voice that the hands of the other halted in surprise above the queer-looking jumble on the work-table.

"Why so hasty, brother?" he chided, "Does it explode if it's touched?"

"No, but I do," grinned David. "Just you leave it alone like a good fellow. Take a cigarette, take a lot, take two!"

Murray Willard laughed as he accepted the peace offering. He was not deeply interested in David's work. He was never deeply interested in anything which had not directly to do with Murray Willard. But his curiosity had been aroused by David's quite unusual perturbation.

"Keeping it dark, are you?" he inquired, lightly. "Quite proper, too—as between friends."

David rumpled his hair. It was a trick he had when perplexed. He also blushed. Being a particularly generous person, the implication of ungenerosity embarrassed him. At the same time he did not intend to have his friendship used as a cracksman might use a jimmy. His firm mouth set itself. But he replied good-humouredly.

"When there is anything definite to show I may show it—as between friends."

The other shrugged his shoulders. He had graceful shoulders and rather cultivated shrugging them. Besides he knew that when David shut his lips question-askers might just as well close theirs.

"Oh, very well," he said, "but at your age, you know, you really ought to control your complexion. A blush like that is wasted on a mystery—unless it be a mystery in petticoats. And talking about petticoats, there's a rather good-looking one two doors down your hall. She's invisible this morning but I noticed her last time

I called. Is this also a case of eyes off, or may one look?"

"Unless the lady herself objects, one may spend one's life in looking."

"Hardly that. One might get eye-strain. But who is she, anyway?"

"There are two of her," said David laughing. "They room together. One is Miss Sims and one is Miss Weeks. Which did she look like?"

Willard reflected. "Like Miss Sims, I think," he decided. "Queer things names. They so often fit. Nobody knows why. This girl is tall and dusky, walks with an air common to duchesses and millinery assistants. Her eyes are—er—'slumberous' is the word, I believe. Common of course, but quite effective in her way."

David who was putting on his tie had the mortification of seeing his own brilliant blush in the mirror. He hated hearing girls, nice girls, called common. He was also young enough to fear being dubbed a prig by others who were not so particular.

"Touched!" exclaimed Willard delightedly, noting the blush.

"I suppose I'm silly," said David, "but the way you talk of girls gives me a pain."

"Not touched!" decided Willard with a sigh. "As long as you defend the whole sex, my child, you are safe. I'll stay to breakfast and meet Miss Sims myself."

"Sorry, but I'm afraid you won't. Not I, but mine landlady protests. *Proper notice for all extra meals and no visitors allowed at any time for breakfast, Mr. Greig, if you please!'* It is a fiat. But if you are serious, I will ask Miss Sims if she would care to meet you. Something might be arranged."

"Heavens, no!" in genuine alarm. "She would suspect me of intentions at once. And one thing I never have is intentions. You see, I know her type. A fiver to a nickel she works in Drummonds?"

"She does," David was genuinely surprised. "She has a good position there. Head of the showroom or assistant head or something. Hats, you know. But I can't see how you guessed."

"The air, my son. All the Drummond girls have it. It is an asset of the store; kind of missing-heiress effect combined with a pity-your-ignorance-poor-thing attitude. It gets them every time. Even the hardened shopper with ideas of her own becomes quite docile under it."

"Well," said David politely. "Will you please go home. I'm hungry."

"Kind and thoughtful host, consider me gone. But before I go let me give you a real tid-bit. That pretty Mary Fox that Fresh Fish is taking around, said last night, in public, that you looked like me, only that I was—ahem: modesty forbids me to proceed."

They both laughed and went out into the hall together. It was coincidence of course that Miss Sims should be emerging from her room at just that moment. David she greeted with a dazzling smile.

"We're all early this morning, Mr. Greig. I do hope I did not disturb you badly in the night."

"Disturb me?" David repeated the words blankly, then, maddened into embarrassment by joyous pokes of the delighted Willard, "I—er—certainly not—not at all!"

"My cough," explained Miss Sims serenely. "Poor Bunny had scarcely a moment of sleep, had you, Bunny?"

Miss Weeks who had joined them on the stairs confirmed this with a languid nod.

David managed to murmur that it was too bad, but as most of his energy was occupied in propelling Mr.

Murray Willard toward the front door, the ladies may well have found his sympathy perfunctory.

Not until they were safely landed on the front steps and with the door shut did he release a formidable hold of his visitor's arm. And then he wished he hadn't, for Murray, weak with mirth, collapsed upon the top step.

"Oh, gentle youth!" he murmured. "Oh, my young innocence—what a shock I got. David, David——" but further comment was cut short by a vigorous push which, the top step being slippery, proved entirely satisfactory.

David turned back to the house.

"That girl's a fool," he said to himself as he went into breakfast.

III

DAVID was mistaken. Miss Clara Henrietta Sims was anything but a fool. She was a very clever and astute young woman. If, taken unprepared, she was likely to make silly remarks; if she was inclined to smile too widely and to allow her fine eyes to assume too "slumberous" a look it was due not to stupidity but to an original lack of breeding which was hardly her fault. Miss Sims, to the world "Clara," and to her family "Henny" had a mind as shrewd as minds are made. It was a mind, too, whose shrewdness was not shackled by too many scruples. She knew what she wanted and quite often she got it.

Long ago, not long in years, for Clara was young, but ages ago in reality, Clara had been born in a room over a small second-hand shop in an Ontario town. Her father was a burly Englishman who owned the store and also the two-wheeled cart which kept it supplied. Clara's mother cleaned and made over the "second-hands." Clara's sister kept the store and dropped her "h's." But Clara was not like her sister. She kept her "h's" and dropped the store.

There is no need to follow her upward progress. It was just the ordinary progress possible to any girl in Canada. It was Clara's clear head and determination rather than her advantages which had brought her to Toronto, to a good post in a first-class store and to Mrs. Carr's select establishment. The second-hand store had fallen far behind. Her memory of it betrayed itself only in a passion for brand-newness which told heavily on her purse. And of course no one knew of it! Clara was careful of that. I am telling you only in strict confidence.

This was Clara's past. She had done well with it. As for her future, she intended to do still better. She intended to marry. Having done some steady climbing, she now desired to take an elevator. Only that morning, while David sat up and hugged his knees, she and her friend Bunny Weeks had been discussing this very matter in their room two doors down the hall.

"Marry?" said Miss Weeks in astonishment. "Whatever do you want to marry for? If I had as good a job as you I'd see myself farther first. I wouldn't think of marrying for ten years anyway."

"No, you wouldn't." Clara removed a hair-pin from her mouth and placed it carefully. "But in ten years you'd think of it—just ten years too late. I don't want to get married. I'd much rather stay on my own but I've got some sense. I've got as far as I can go without help. I am as far ahead in Drummond's as I'll ever get. And there is no other store as good."

"You might get to be buyer."

Clara shook her head. "No, I couldn't be buyer. It takes something I haven't got. I'm not so silly as to be conceited. I'm good where I am but I can't design and I can't do good buying. Haven't got the right kind of taste. Oh, I know you'd never guess it! I'm a good imitator. With the stock chosen and the designing done I can make people believe I know it all. In the showroom I carry it off. The customers fall for me. But where'll I be when I begin to show wear? Or if I get ill or need a long holiday? Drummond's are fairly decent. They'd give me a chance in the work-room, I suppose, where I wouldn't be a bit of good and then they'd let me go. I'd have to think of marriage then. I prefer to think of it now, see!"

Bunny, gazing at her far-sighted friend through a cloud of fuzzy, fair hair, did see.

"Gee, you're clever, Henny! You see a lot farther than your nose, you do. Who is he? Trot him out. Or are you just sort of looking around?"

Miss Sims, whose well-brushed hair was now adjusted satisfactorily, dabbed her soft fingers in warm water preparatory to their morning polish. Her tone grew dreamy.

"I used to think I'd marry a millionaire. It's easy, in books. But I soon learned better. Millionaires are not looking around after pretty shop girls—to marry them. All the same I'm going to marry well. I'm going to marry some one who will count."

Bunny's white rabbit-eyes bulged.

"How?" she questioned, not in any carping spirit but as one who asks for information.

"By getting in early and growing up with the town."

Bunny did not understand this and said so.

"I mean," Clara polished a pink nail carefully upon a pink palm. "I am going to marry some young fellow who hasn't got anywhere yet but who is certainly going to. I don't mind waiting a year or two. There are things I'll have to learn anyway. I'll be ready when he is."

"I'll bet you will!" Bunny's admiration was instant and unstinted, but her more timid mind began at once to qualify. "But how can you be sure he—what if you pick the wrong one?" she ventured.

Clara smiled.

"I'm not good at millinery, but I'm good at men," she said. "I won't pick the wrong one. Trust me!"

"Do you know any one now?"

"I may."

"Do you know more than one?"

"Um—perhaps."

"Is Mr. Fish one?"

Miss Sims laughed. "I'm not starting a kindergarten."

"I don't see what you're laughing at. I like him. He's nice. And his folks are rich. Besides you said you wanted some one young."

"But not an infant—who is also a nonentity. That Fish boy will have some money when his father dies, but his father isn't going to die for ages. And anyway, what's money unless it's huge? It doesn't get you anywhere."

"You're not thinking of Mr. Martin?"

Clara flicked Mr. Martin over her shoulder as one might flick an annoying fly.

"Absolutely not!" said she.

"Then is it Mr. Barker down at Drummonds?"

Clara took this more seriously but shook her head.

"No, Barker's a clever man but he's not a big man. He'll be highly paid but he'll always be an employee. I don't intend to be an employee's wife."

"Well then—I can't think of any one else."

"Can't you?" Clara smiled her slightly too wide smile. Caution told her that she had better say no more, but her nature was not fine enough for many reserves. "What about the new boarder with the blush?"

"That Greig?" Bunny's voice was quite shrill in its surprise. "Why he's nobody. He doesn't even know what he's going in for. And his father's just a kind of fancy carpenter. I found out all about him from Mr. Fish. Mr. Fish thinks he's a wonder, but that's just because he's his chum. And look at the way he dresses!"

"I do," said Miss Sims with some tartness. "He dresses like a man who has something to think about besides clothes. And I don't care what his father is. I'm not thinking of marrying his father. I'm not exactly the Queen of England myself. But that young man is going to win out. He's going to be a big man. I'm not the only one who's noticed it. I've heard others say the same. Look at his head—look at his eyes!"

"He's got nice eyes."

"Well, nice isn't anything. I'm afraid you're stupid, Bunny!"

This was so true that it struck a spark. Bunny did not like being called stupid. A spice of malice stole into her voice.

"Well, his eyes don't look at you anyway!" she declared sulkily.

Miss Sims finished her nails in silence. But her smile persisted.

As a matter of fact she knew that David's eyes did not look at her—yet. They would, presently. Clara's confidence was superb. She had never yet failed in attracting any man's eyes. It was easy enough. David was slower than usual but there was no hurry. He was that easiest of all victims, the young man who doesn't take girls seriously. One pretty girl was just like another to David at present. It would be Clara's duty to make him see that some were prettier than others.

As for opportunity, the ordinary life of the boarding-house would provide plenty of that; if it didn't, there were ways of helping. There was dancing for instance. How fortunate it was that everybody danced now! Even Mrs. Carr had frostily acknowledged the new craze to the extent of leaving the parlour rug untacked, ready to be rolled up almost every evening by the eager hands of the dance-mad. Most of the dances were new. At least they were sure to be new to David, and Clara quite saw herself in the rôle of kindly teacher. She was a good dancer. Indeed she loved it as she loved few things. Something primitive in her responded passionately to the colour and rhythm of it. When she danced she glowed. Even she, used as she was to cataloguing her own attractions, did not realise the change it made. Yes, she would certainly offer to teach the new boarder to dance.

Of course there would have to be some adjustment. Clara's shrewdness had already told her that her natural style was not likely to appeal to this clear-eyed, rather cool young man. But that was a detail. Clara had a dozen styles, all easily adjustable, not to be distinguished from the real thing. She had no doubt but that in her repertoire she would find something to suit David. For the matter of that, he wasn't her style either. It was her ambition he appealed to, not her taste. But if things went well, that was not important. One can't have everything.

So mused Miss Sims and, as she mused, her smile deepened. Still, she already felt a little sorry that she had mentioned names to Bunny. Bunny would be watching now. It would be necessary to hurry things a trifle. David must be made to look at her at once. Then if with open eyes he saw her day after day it would be a queer thing if her boast to Bunny were not more than justified.

That very morning, as we have seen, David did look at Miss Sims. He looked at her with distaste, it is true, and he called her a fool; but, as many girls less clever than Clara could tell you, that is not at all a bad beginning.

It had taken David only a very few minutes to dispose of his ribald visitor, yet when he entered the dining-room it appeared that adjustments had taken place during his absence for, as he turned to smile at Miss Walker whose chair was next to his at table, he smiled at Miss Sims instead.

David repressed the smile, bowed slightly and began at once upon his cereal. Hang the girl! What had she changed her seat for? Well if she expected him to waste time talking to her she would be disillusioned. But, to his surprise, his neighbour showed no disposition for conversation. He had finished his cereal and was helping himself to bacon before she spoke at all. And then it was only to explain in a perfunctory manner that Miss Walker had been kind enough to change seats with her for a day or two on account of her wretched cold. She hoped Mr. Greig didn't mind?

A quick glance down the table showed that Clara's old seat had indeed been the draughtiest in the room, a very bad seat for any one with a cold. Immediately David was suffused with shame. What a cad he must be getting to fancy for an instant that—that—well, to fancy anything at all! The reaction made his answer to Miss Sims quite cordial, almost warm. And he passed her several things she didn't need in quick succession. A cold was indeed a wretched thing! He hoped she would soon be better.

The natural Clara would have replied archly "Oh, are you so anxious to get rid of me?" But Clara knew that David would not like the natural Clara so she refrained from archness and sighed instead.

Yes, she told him, a girl working for herself had to be careful. Even a slight illness might mean so much. One couldn't blame employers of course. Their business depended upon the efficiency of their people. Still— Clara had a fascinating way of leaving sentences unfinished. David felt a stirring of interest.

"But I thought Drummond's had the name of being awfully decent to their employees?"

Clara did not like being called an employee. But she showed no resentment. Instead she coughed, a tiny cough, and sighed again.

"Oh, they are," she said. "It isn't that."

David was left to think out what it was, if it wasn't that, and the problem increased his interest.

"I suppose," he began in an argumentative tone, "that for any one engaged in a regular business health means a great deal. But that is true in a man's case as well as in a woman's."

His tone appeared to frighten Clara. He caught her timid look and felt like a big brute.

"Oh," she said hastily. "I didn't mean to—that is, a woman who works must of course face the same conditions as a man. She has to, only——"

"Only it's harder. Is that what you mean?"

"Well, to say that would sound like complaining. But it is a little different, isn't it?"

The beautiful vagueness of this did not strike David. His sympathy had been touched. The phrase "a woman who works" vexed him. Women did work, were working more and more all the time. He knew that. He had carelessly supposed that they liked it. David's views on the woman question were very old-fashioned. He hadn't evolved them for himself but had had them delivered to him, ready made, by Angus Greig, whose ideas of women were quite twenty years behind the times. They consisted principally in the belief that woman is a higher being yet a weaker being, too. Some one to be looked up to, yet protected. The other half of man, but certainly not the bread-winning half. It gave him a little shock to realise that the pretty girl beside him was, of stern necessity, out in the world earning her living; afraid to indulge a cold even, for fear of financial consequences.

"It's a shame!" he stammered and then felt foolish for having said such a futile thing.

"Oh no," said Miss Sims bravely, "one shouldn't complain. After all it is better than being dependent on some one who—who might not—it would be dreadful to be a burden."

A burden? This pretty young thing a burden? David felt a rising indignation against some person or persons unknown. What was the girl's father thinking of? if she had a father; where were her brothers? if she had any.

"And I am much better off than many others," went on Clara with sweet cheerfulness, "for I am really quite strong."

Now up until this moment David, if he had thought about Miss Sims at all, had always thought of her as an ordinarily robust person. Yet the moment that she asserted her strength he began to doubt it. He was distinctly conscious of receiving an impression that she wasn't as strong as she looked. He wondered if the colour in her face were really a sign of delicacy? He had heard that it sometimes was.

Miss Sims, having now performed the difficult feat of eating a substantial breakfast without appearing to eat anything, folded her serviette (they always called them serviettes at Mrs. Carr's) and rose.

"I mustn't be late," she said, and once again she gave the impression of a fragile thing sacrificed in the arena of modern commercialism.

But as she passed down the table the natural Clara asserted itself and bestowed a long, slow wink upon the admiring Miss Weeks.

David finished his breakfast thoughtfully. He hadn't seen the wink.

IV

DAVID'S solicitude about Miss Sims' cold was not prolonged. It got better very quickly. A cold, as Clara explained to Bunny Weeks, is a good thing for a starter but a nuisance to go on with. One is so apt to overdo it, or to forget about it altogether. Besides, healthy young men like healthy young girls as long as they are not too terribly healthy. A hint of fragility does not come amiss but fragility is quite different from ill-health. Clara cultivated a fragile air in these days, depending largely on a slimness for which nature was only partly responsible; an excellent knowledge of corsets being the contributing factor.

Without knowing why, David began to take a greater interest in mealtime. It was rather nice to have some one beside him to say a word to occasionally. Miss Sims wisely let him say most of the words. She knew that his own words would be less likely to make mistakes than her's would. But she questioned and commented with some skill until David, never a great talker, felt that he was doing awfully well. He congratulated himself on a social ease which increased daily. Once in a while he ventured upon a little joke. Miss Sims always laughed and this gave confidence. True, she sometimes laughed in the wrong place but it was too pleasant a laugh to quarrel with. David wondered how it could have been that once he had dismissed this nice girl from his mind as "a silly giggler."

She hardly giggled at all. And her comments on questions of the day, which David's conversation usually introduced, were marked by an intelligence quite noticeable—if somewhat inconsistent. The inconsistency, could David have known it, was caused merely by the fact that Miss Sims did not always crib her opinions from the same newspaper. This is why she often appeared to change her mind over night. It was only an appearance, for on all these questions Clara had no mind to change.

"I like to see a girl who hasn't settled all the questions of the universe before she is twenty," declared David to Billy Fish apropos of this broadmindedness of Clara's.

Mr. Fish groaned. For a man of the world like himself Clara had no complexities, principally because she had never tried to have. He couldn't understand David's blindness.

"Oh, gracious sakes, gadzooks" said Billy, "this is what I get for bringing you up so innocent. That little Dotty from Drummond's puts it all over you without lifting a lid. Can't you see she's faking, you blind old bat?"

David looked uncomfortable.

"Billy," he said, "I don't want to seem priggish——"

"Oh, don't fret over what you can't help!"

—"But honestly I don't like the way you and Willard speak about that young girl. I—I don't like it."

" 'Young girl' is good," said Billy, thoughtfully. "So nice and old fatherly. You mean you don't take to the pretty name 'Dotty from Drummond's?' You prefer to think of her as 'Clara from the country?' All in favour?—carried. Only do use your eyes, old chap. If you must flirt, flirt with the Bunny one. I'll withdraw in your favour. She is quite harmless. I almost like the Bunny one."

"So much has been obvious for some time."

"Has it? As much as that? Well, a fellow has to go around with some one. And it's quite off with Mary

Fox. She called me Mr. Fish last time we met. It's a sign I always consider fatal. But she has never been the same since that night I invited her to a show and you didn't turn up to escort the friend. Somehow the friend and I didn't seem to hit it off. Do you know I rather got the idea that she was laughing at me."

"Impossible!"

"Fact. Say, Greiggy, I hate to humour your foolishness but if you're determined to be a fool anyway it can't matter. What do you say to a show to-morrow night—and take the girls?"

"I'm pretty busy. Anyway I don't think Miss Sims would go."

"You don't think—oh lor!" began Billy, then added patiently, "you could try anyway."

David, not wishing to seem ungracious, did try and with astounding success. Miss Sims would go. She did not think it wise to go out too often in the evenings as it left one so tired for the next day's work which was hardly fair to one's employers, was it? Still, perhaps a little excitement did one good, and if Bunny was going with that Mr. Fish perhaps it would be just as well to go also. It was very kind of Mr. Greig to ask her. Thanks very much.

David explained this point of view to Billy who whistled

"That girl's almost too clever," he said, "she'll die of it if she isn't careful. Dave, old thing, can't you——" but, seeing by the expression on David's face that he really couldn't, Billy whistled again and resigned him to the fates.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that David was in love with Miss Sims. Love had not touched David with even the tip of her wing. The divine fire had caught no spark from Clara's eyes, even that more human flame which is so often mistaken for it, was still unkindled. No one realised this better than Clara herself. She knew the signs and the symptoms, and they were lacking. David's eyes did not falter when they looked at her, nor did his hand linger on her's. Often he sat beside her and forgot that she was there. Clara was piqued, but self-deception was no part of her philosophy. Even to Bunny Weeks she was frank.

"Things seem to be coming your way all right," said Bunny that night as they discussed the just delivered invitation. "Of course Mr. Fish is asking me because Mr. Greig wants to take you. And not so long ago he didn't know you existed. I don't see how you manage it!" There was a spice of envy in the admiring tone.

Clara looked up from the silk stocking she was darning with sudden suspicion but the other's face was quite ingenuous.

"I'd like to agree with you," said Clara, "but I happen to know better. As far as that young man is concerned I might fade away to-morrow and not leave a spot."

"Why, he talks to you all the time!"

"Yes, he talks to me, as he might talk to a clam—absolutely. He thinks he's a clam himself, but he isn't. What that young man needs is a little warming up." Clara's sombre eyes glowed and she jerked her thread so sharply that it broke. "He's the cold-storage kind, warranted to keep indefinitely, if undisturbed. But he's not going to be left undisturbed—not if I know myself! I tell you, Bunny, when he looks at me as if I were his maiden aunt I fairly hate him! I'd—I'd like to stick pins in him! And I will. Watch me."

"Why, Henny!" Miss Weeks was clearly amazed at this outburst. "I thought you were getting along so fine. I think he's lovely to you, opening the door for you the way he does and all. As for the way he looks at you, I'd *like* to have a man look at me like that."

Clara laid down her stocking and arose. It was a sultry autumn night, unseasonable and oppressive. Clara was ready for bed and the loose kimono she wore had slipped back from her white shoulders leaving them bare above the filmy nightdress which clung to her supple figure with less than classic scantness. Seen so she was superbly young, beautiful, virile, and quite without a soul.

Or if she had a soul, it slept!

Leaning close to the mirror the girl looked long into the depths of her own dark eyes, marked the red of her lips, the sweetly curving of throat and bosom. There was life and warmth there—a fire which seemed to make even the chill glass glow to meet it. Clara's lips relaxed in a slow smile.

"Would you?" she asked. "Well—I don't!"

She turned abruptly from the mirror, rolled the half-mended stocking into a crumpled ball and pitched it into an untidy corner. Then, with businesslike celerity, began to braid her hair for the night. Clara had taken stock of her weapons and had not found them rusted.

The other girl, colder and more simple, more timid too, couldn't understand Henny in these opulent moods. She wasn't sure that it was nice to stare at one's self in the mirror—like that! Certainly not when some one else was looking. Occasionally perhaps, when one was quite alone? Anything more seemed not quite—ladylike? Yet if Miss Clara Sims of the showroom at Drummond's were not the pink of ladyhood, where then were ladies?

Clara went through the remainder of her nightly ritual without speaking. Her brow was gathered into a slight frown and beneath her lowered lids there was an angry spark.

"If you're as mad at him as all that, I suppose you won't go to that show," ventured Bunny discontentedly.

"Don't be silly!"

This brought things down to their usual level.

"Bunny," said Clara as she turned out the light, "isn't it to-morrow night that you promised to stay with Fanny Allenby?"

"Yes. But that needn't interfere with anything. I've got to go to Fanny because she'll be alone and I promised, but I can 'phone her that I'll be late and Mr. Fish can take me there just as easy as he could bring me back here. Why? *You* don't mind being alone, do you?"

Clara slipped into bed and in the darkness her little, derisive laugh was answer enough.

The next day was what was known locally as a "weather-breeder." Instead of the wholesome tang of autumn, there was a hot, still, stickiness in the air which reacted upon all nature alike. Dogs snapped, cats scratched and humans grew restless and irritable. David found himself wishing that he hadn't invited Miss Sims to a show. He, too, felt uneasy, but not entirely on account of the weather. He had had a letter that morning from Cousin Mattie which had given body to fears for the health of Angus, which he had felt for some time. The carpenter had been failing for a year but he had never admitted it. Neither had he allowed Miss Mattie to admit it; both she and David knew that the surest way to annoy him was to ask after his health. He made no changes in his way of life but its pace was slowing. More than ever now he seemed to be as one who sits aside, letting the river of life run by. But no one must sit beside him; he was, as he had always been, alone.

This morning's letter had said, "Angus has just come in from the workshop and sends his love. He tires easily of late. Davy dear, I wish, whiles, you were here; but do not come for he would not like it."

The strain and tension of the day increased and toward night it was apparent that an unusual storm was brewing.

"It'll be a smasher too," predicted Billy Fish as he and David waited for the girls upon the veranda. "Say, p'r'aps the ladies won't honour us."

"I wish they wouldn't," said David, and next moment he had coloured to the ears for there was a rustle of feminine drapery just behind him. If the invited guests heard the ungallant speech they gave no sign. Both of them were dressed in their daintiest, their specially coiffeured hair alone denoting their destination.

"Oh, they're going all right!" whispered Billy resignedly.

A low growl of thunder greeted them as they stepped out of the door.

"Oh gracious!" exclaimed Miss Weeks with a Bunny-like shiver, "that's why I've had a headache all day. I always do when it's going to thunder."

David felt impelled to say that theatres were not good for headaches but in view of what they might have overheard he felt that the advice might not sound disinterested. Besides, Miss Sims was putting on her gloves.

"It won't break before we get home," said Clara calmly, "but I shan't be surprised if it's a wild night."

Bunny glanced at her friend curiously. She knew that Clara detested thunder, yet there had been a strange note of satisfaction in her prophesy.

No rain fell before they entered the theatre, nor did the threat of it seem much nearer, but it is doubtful if any one of our small party really enjoyed the play. David, whose thoughts slipped continually to Milhampton, found the thread of the story hard to follow and the dénouement illogical to a degree. Bunny was disappointed because, on account of the threatened storm, there were many empty seats and she loved a crowd: the feel of a packed house was better than a play to her. Even the irrepressible Billy was more subdued than usual. Of them all, Clara alone seemed pleasurably excited. Her face was slightly flushed, her eyes very dark. Between his flights to Milhampton David noticed this with approval. She was, he thought, an exceedingly pretty girl. And how warm and light the touch of her hand on his arm! He wondered what had excited her—the play was certainly very dull.

When it was over they came out into a night which was breathlessly waiting for the breaking storm. The streets were almost empty, playgoers were skurrying home before the coming of the wind. Billy, not displeased with the prospect of the long ride which Bunny's engagement with the lonely Miss Allenby entailed, hurried his charge into a passing car. But David, more considerate or with more money in his pocket, suggested the safety and comfort of Miss Sims would be best served by a taxi. Miss Sims did not protest. She looked upon taxis as her right, anyway. As he sprang in beside her he became delicately aware of this and thanked heaven that, he had not, through sheer ignorance, followed Billy's example. He even went so far as to say, virtuously, that he was afraid Miss Weeks might get wet in that open street-car.

As he spoke the first stiff gust of wind snatched the words from his lips. A sharp crack of thunder followed and big drops turned the white pavements black and glistening.

"Well, we're quite all right here," he added with satisfaction. "Better pull up your coat though. You're not frightened are you?"—To his surprise his companion had let her ungloved hand fall lightly on his sleeve, and the hand was trembling. David could feel the tremble: What ought one to do? While he was still debating this, the hand withdrew, somewhat abruptly.

"N—o, I'm not frightened," said Miss Sims. "Of course I'm not afraid of just a storm, but——"

"But you're terrified of it just the same?" David had become quite expert in completing Miss Sims' sentences. It was plain that the poor girl was nervous. "You needn't be ashamed of it," went on her escort kindly. "My Cousin Mattie who is as brave as a lion, is quite foolish about thunder——"

A strange little sound from Clara made him pause to ask if she were quite comfortable.

"Cousin Mattie," he went on, "does the most absurd things——"

"I am sorry," said Clara in a choked voice, "if I have seemed absurd."

"You? Oh no, not at all. Certainly not. But it's natural for a woman to be nervous. Cousin Mattie——"

"Oh!"

Clara could hardly be blamed for her interruption this time since an especially vivid flash had caused the driver to cut a corner so sharply that she was thrown almost into David's arms. In the instant's flashing light he saw her face, flushed and vivid with parted lips red, and very near his own. It made him quite forget about Cousin Mattie for the moment.

"Steady!" he warned. "That was a sharp turn. It's all right though. We'll be home in a moment. I'll tell the driver to try safety first."

In the darkness he felt the girl draw back. He could scarcely see her but the vision of her vivid face seemed everywhere—Oddly enough she hadn't *looked* frightened! But one never can tell. He put out his hand toward her reassuringly and called to the taxi man to be more careful. The car slowed a little.

"There's no need——" began David, "Oh, I say—that was a twister!"

The storm, having decided to break, was breaking to some purpose. A blinding flash was followed by a roar which seemed to rock the car. Another flash came swiftly and then that ominous shattering crash which tells of a "hit" near by. David, startled himself, became conscious of a soft resistance against his reassuring arm and hastily turning was just in time to see Miss Sims crumple up in a most alarming fashion, her uncovered head falling limply on his shoulder.

"She's fainted!" thought the distracted young man in horror. "Oh, what utter fools we were to come! Now what in thunder do people do with fainting ladies in taxis?"

"Perhaps the taxi man would know."

"Hi! driver!" shouted David. "Stop up, can't you, or drive somewhere—the lady's fainted!"

The dark head on his shoulder moved slightly. Perhaps the stentorian call had revived it. "No, no," the girl managed to murmur, "I'm quite all right—a little giddy!—nothing at all!"

"What say?" bawled the driver, slackening speed.

"Nothing!" yelled David. "Go on! Get a hustle on! —Say, are you feeling better now, Miss Sims? Hadn't we better stop and get some salts—smelling-salts—or something?"

Miss Sims, who had resumed the perpendicular with amazing promptness, seemed unreasonably irritated by the idea of smelling-salts. David didn't catch exactly what she said but the tone of it was scarcely grateful.

"Cousin Mattie"—began David.

"Oh, good heavens!" said Miss Sims.

He almost thought she was going off again. But she didn't. She sat up quite straight and seemed much stronger. David was greatly relieved.

"By George, you did frighten me," he told her. "You seemed to go all floppy just in a moment. That crash was certainly a bad one. Thank heaven, we are just home. You'd better take my arm. A shock like that leaves one giddy."

Miss Sims was not giddy. She declined the aid of David's arm, she even declined his umbrella, with the result that her dark hair was very wet and somewhat draggled when she met (as late returning boarders were liable to meet) the landlady in the hall. Mrs. Carr did not fail to remark upon the proper uses of umbrellas, also upon a certain paleness and perturbation noticeable in Miss Sims.

"She has had a slight shock," explained David. "That last crash seemed to miss us by about two inches."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Carr. She said nothing else. Her cold prominent eyes swept over the disarranged Clara with the pitiless directness of a searchlight. Then she passed on. David, passing on too, wondered why he felt uncomfortable!

Safely within his room, with the door shut, the blessed usualness of things reassured him. There was nothing to feel uncomfortable about, nothing at all! The evening had not been exactly a successful one, but it was over. He hoped Silly Billy had got Miss Weeks safely to her destination. Had Billy refrained from taking a taxi for economical reasons, or because—well, of course there could have been only one reason; Billy was sure not to have had any spare cash. Besides, street-cars are fairly safe, safer perhaps than taxis when drivers turn corners on one wheel. Poor Miss Sims, how nervous she had been! And how embarrassed the poor girl must have felt when she realised that she—he supposed that some fellows would have enjoyed——

"Oh, don't talk rot, you hypocrite, you!" he said fiercely to his thinking self. "You know very well you'd have enjoyed it yourself if you cared for the girl! Even as it was you enjoyed it. Don't lie to me!"

Having admitted this and placated his own honesty, he had time to feel thankful that he at least had had the grace not to add to the embarrassment of the lady by in any way taking advantage of her nervous state. He was glad that he had behaved like a gentleman. It would have been too bad to have imperilled a very pleasant friendship.

David got ready for bed. It was still very hot and close. The sharp shower of rain had worn itself out; the thunder had reduced itself to rumbles; yet one felt that only the outposts of the storm had passed. In pyjamas and dressing-gown David pottered about the room. Never had he felt less inclined for sleep. Electricity in the air had always quickened him. It quickened him now. His mind grew clear, alert; it assumed an expectant attitude. The inventor in him recognised that strange expectancy and leaped exultantly to meet it. It is in moments like this that inspiration comes! David looked at his work-table and all thought of sleep vanished. His mind had already shaken itself free, and was away, down the endless road of speculation and possibility. Presently on the paper before him his pencil began to trace strange lines. He did not hear Billy Fish come in and whistle in his key-hole as he went upstairs. He did not hear Mrs. Carr bar the front door and pass along the hall. He did not hear the thunder gather and break again. His mind pursued his vision—farther, farther! Now he almost touched it; now he lost it altogether. And always he tasted the wonder and excitement of the chase!

The sultriness died out of the air but in his absorption he did not notice the change; he did not know that a cool wind, wet with rain, blew directly in through the open window. It might have been months or hours that he sat there, noticing nothing, then, for no explicable reason, the searching mind faltered, wavered, turned back upon itself.

"Mr. Greig!"

It was his own name that had recalled him. His own name spoken low but in a tone whose penetration had reached him when the thunder had failed. David stirred and dropped his pencil.

"Yes?"

Still dizzy with dreams he turned, only to feel sure that he was dreaming still. The door, the door into the hall, had opened and was just closing, while inside it and bright against it's dark panels, her hand still on the door-knob, stood a girl in a red kimono. David in his first dizziness thought he had never seen the girl before. She was startlingly strange—all red and white with black hair tumbled about her shoulders. White face, red lips, red drapery over something white, from beneath which a white foot peeped. A midnight dream of a girl, with dark eyes and—by George, it was Miss Sims!

"Oh, Mr. Greig!" the strangeness vanished as the vision spoke. "I am so terrified! I am sure there is some one in my room—the window on the balcony! Something woke me—I was so *frightened*. Every one's asleep but I saw your light—I just ran——"

David was wide-awake now. Burglars belong to the world of every day. There is nothing in the least dreamy about a burglar.

"Stay here a second," he said excitedly, "I'll go and see!"

"Oh, please!" the girl was breathing so quickly she could scarcely speak. "Please go. Wait a minute! Don't make a noise, go quietly!"

David nodded his understanding. Naturally, one doesn't make noises if one wishes to catch burglars.

He opened the door, gently so that it might not squeak, and cautiously peered out.

There was wind in the hall, a heavy draught from somewhere, but no burglar, only Mrs. Carr who had just come down the attic stairs!

Mrs. Carr was decorously clad in bedroom slippers, a wrapper and a boudoir cap. In her hand she carried a large white object which looked like a sheet.

"S—sish!" said David, but as no one ever said "S—sish," to Mrs. Carr she naturally did not do it.

"Still up, Mr. Greig?" said she, "that is so fortunate. I feared I might have to disturb you. I hope you won't mind, but the lightning is so bad. I found myself unable to sleep knowing that your mirror was uncovered—Mr. Fish's too. I have just been covering his. Mirrors attract lightning as I suppose you know, but young men never think of these things. We might all be burned in our beds. If you will allow me——"

"S—shish!" repeated David.

"*What?*" asked Mrs. Carr.

"There's a burglar!" explained David. "He——"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Carr. "I never have burglars. *If* you will allow me!"—she did not wait to be allowed but threw open the door herself.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Carr.

It was incredibly funny! David knew it was funny. He would laugh at it presently but just now there was the burglar to be considered. He waved both ladies farther into the room.

"You stay here," he ordered, "I hoped to goodness we haven't frightened him away!"

With swift, light steps he made his way toward the door of the invaded room, then with a strategic rush, so as to give the intruder no time, he entered. The room, like the hall, was full of wind. The draught came from there for the window was widely open. The long curtains blew straight out. But, save for its ordinary furniture, the room was empty. David made a thorough search, then he closed the window and, opening the door, called to the waiting ladies to come nearer.

"It's quite safe," he assured them. "There is no one here."

"I didn't suppose there was," said Mrs. Carr with horrible brevity.

"Eh?" stammered David.

Miss Sims, who had drawn her red kimono very completely around her, said nothing at all. She looked frightened.

"What's the matter?" piped a shrill voice. A head, decorated with curling-pins, was poked inquisitively out of Miss Walker's door.

"Nothing at all," said Mrs. Carr austerely. "Miss Sims became alarmed. Mr. Greig and I have been reassuring her."

"Oh!" said Miss Walker.

David felt his head begin to swim. What did "Oh" mean, when said like that? What did it mean when said as Mrs. Carr had said it when she opened his door and saw Clara? Women oughtn't to be allowed to use a word with so many meanings. It amounted to little less than a universal language! Well, thank heaven it wasn't his business. He stood aside to let the ladies pass in.

Neither of them stirred. The episode was apparently not ended. Mrs. Carr, having looked carefully at the closed doors of the corridor, cleared her throat. Judges always clear their throats.

"If a man entered by the window," said Mrs. Carr, "we will doubtless find traces upon the carpet."

The pouring rain outside was proof enough of this deduction.

"Why of course," said David, "we may get a footprint. Let's look!"

Miss Sims still said nothing. She followed them into her room silently. Mrs. Carr went over to the window which David had closed. The window-sill was still running water, the carpet beneath it was drenched. The rain had made good use of the open window, but nowhere, in any part of the room, was there the slightest trace of any other intruder. The light carpet would have shown a footmark as plainly as if stamped in ink.

"You must have dreamed it!" said David a trifle crossly.

"I must have," said the girl. She spoke with a curious little gasp.

"Under the circumstances," said Mrs. Carr, "I must ask you, Miss Sims, to take a week's notice."

If one of David's precious experiments had suddenly exploded he would not have been half so startled.

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked.

"I think there is no need for words." Mrs. Carr had inadvertently draped the sheet over her left shoulder, thus conveying an idea of classic justice which was exceedingly comic. David felt an impulse toward convulsive mirth. But something in the grim eye of the statue steadied him.

"I came down," went on the statue, "intending to protect my boarders from possible extinction by lightning and I find——" a large and comprehensive gesture of her unencumbered arm seemed sufficient exposition of what Mrs. Carr had found. "I say nothing. It is not my place. But a week's notice, Miss Sims, will I think be sufficient."

At last the girl spoke. But her words seemed curiously to lack conviction. "I was frightened. I ran into Mr. Greig's room——"

"There were," interrupted Justice, "other rooms to run into."

This was so true that David found himself quite seeing the point of it.

"Yes, I know. But I thought that a man——"

"There is a man much nearer than Mr. Greig," said Justice. "A man old enough to spare you any embarrassment. Mr. Worsnop would have been delighted to have reassured you."

In the slight pause which followed, David caught the girl's frightened eyes and for the first time woke to the full danger and significance of the situation—this farcical, incredible misunderstanding! Never had David blushed as he blushed then.

"The blush of confusion well becomes you, young man!" said Mrs. Carr sternly.

"Oh but—but this is absurd!" stammered David. "Mrs. Carr, I assure you—if you had come into the hall a moment earlier——"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Carr. It was another word of the universal language, something like "oh," only more so.

David sought the girl's eyes for direction but she had turned her head aside.

"I am sure you can take our word," he began again with some dignity. "The explanation is very simple.

Miss Sims thought a burglar had entered at her window. That she was mistaken has nothing to do with the case. She had just at that moment run into my room, seeing my light and being too terrified to care where she went, and I was just running out——"

"Excuse me. You were not running out, Mr. Greig, you were peeking out."

"Well, naturally, to see if the coast were clear."

"Exactly."

"I wanted to catch the fellow, didn't I?" David was getting heated. "I had to surprise him!"

"You surprised me instead," said Mrs. Carr. "I ask you, Mr. Greig, not to consider me a fool." Then, softening a little at the look on the young man's ingenuous face, "I am not blaming you unduly. You may believe that what you say is correct. But I must insist that if Miss Sims were really alarmed by a supposed burglar the natural, the proper thing for her to have done is sufficiently apparent."

"The natural thing!" cried David now thoroughly confused and agitated. "But she *did* the natural thing!"

"Why?" The implacable question silenced him. He knew there must be a satisfactory answer, but for the life of him he couldn't think of it. His brain seemed unable to function. He looked at the girl with a wild trust in her woman's wit. "Tell her," he said, "tell her the reason!"

An instant change took place in the girl's averted face. The fright, real or feigned, died out of it. Suddenly she seemed mistress of herself and of the situation. "Shall I?" she murmured with delicate hesitation.

"Certainly," said David.

"Well, you see," Miss Sims smiled a soft smile right into Mrs. Carr's hard eyes, "it was quite natural for me to run to Mr. Greig the moment I was frightened, because I—we are engaged to be married!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Carr.

V

THE storm passed away with the night. David woke to find a new-washed sun sparkling through the window upon the white sheets which covered his work table and hung from the mirror like unfamiliar ghosts. For a moment he wondered what these fantastic draperies might mean. Then came recollection, a rueful smile or two and a quickening of the pulses as he realised that to-day was not quite as yesterday.

He sat up and reflected. The memories of the night were curiously flattened and unreal in the sunlight. He had gone to sleep feeling worried, he woke feeling inclined to laugh. It was as if the darkness had dressed up a bogie to frighten him just as Mrs. Carr had shrouded the mirror in sheets. Both seemed absurd now that daylight had come!

What a silly old thing Mrs. Carr was, anyway! Fancy trying to do the tragic over such an entirely simple affair! The storm must have upset the old lady's nerves. She was probably feeling properly foolish this morning. Well, she deserved to feel foolish. She had come very nearly making things ugly for that nice girl down the hall. If it hadn't been for the keen wit of the girl herself there might have been a regular scene!

David smiled admiringly as he thought of how smartly Miss Sims had saved the situation. Women, he reflected, must understand each other extraordinarily well, else how could Clara have hit upon the one thing which had so completely routed the enemy? And all on the impulse of the moment! David himself would never have thought of it. He smiled again at the memory of the statue of Justice suddenly transforming itself into an ordinary and somewhat apologetic landlady. And all because Miss Sims had told that white fib about their being engaged. David hoped that he had played the game and had not allowed his amazement at the announcement to appear too plainly.

Having shot her bolt, Miss Sims, under cover of a downcast look, had gracefully retired, leaving the situation and the landlady in his hands. He congratulated himself on having managed both quite cleverly. Without protest he had allowed Mrs. Carr to divest herself of the sheet in favour of his mirror and had even offered another sheet to shroud the table where various bright things glittered.

Lightning, Mrs. Carr declared, always "made for" bright objects. David agreed. Under the circumstances he would have agreed to anything. So perfect was his attitude in fact that Mrs. Carr had relaxed her rigid front to the extent of explaining her previous attitude.

"Not that I wish ever to be hard on any one, Mr. Greig," she had assured him, "but you know what it is, keeping a select house like this. It isn't easy, not in a city. One never knows. And it is impossible to be too careful. I assure you—the merest breath! And what with seeing you two come in late and Miss Sims so flustered and all and then in the dead of night to open a door—and I still think, Mr. Greig, that she might have waited to put on a wrapper—it was enough to give any one a turn. Not that I ever think evil, on principle. As it is, I am sure I congratulate you both on your engagement. Although I must say you are rather young to be thinking of so serious a step as marriage; younger, Mr. Greig, than she is, if I am any judge."

"Thanks," said David, "I—er—you won't say anything about it, will you?"

"Certainly not," promised Mrs. Carr with fervour. David's present freedom from worry was largely owing to the fact that he believed her.

Now that morning had come, all these recollections seemed quite amusing. His main interest in them seemed to be a growing curiosity as to how that clever Miss Sims, having got them into the present situation so neatly, would get them out of it again. She had probably already thought of some simple way. To his own masculine mind the simplest of all would be just to tell Mrs. Carr the truth. Last night she had been excited and unreasonable but to-day she could certainly be made to understand.

David's one real terror was lest Billy Fish should hear of the occurrence! That would indeed be frightful. David shivered as he thought of the endless ragging which would then be his inevitable portion. Funny as the affair was he had no desire to have it contribute to the gaiety of nations.

He was early at breakfast. In his heart he expected his partner in the conspiracy to be early also. They might seize a moment to arrange the gentle undeceiving of Mrs. Carr. He knew that he would feel a little better when that was done. But Miss Sims was late. When finally she did slip into her seat, the table had filled up and there was no chance of a private word.

She looked very pretty this morning, and, perhaps, a trifle more fragile; worrying, no doubt! It was a shame that she should have to worry. He, David, must be ready to help her to any extent in his power.

"It is a lovely morning," he said as he rose. "If you don't mind, I'll wait for you and we can walk down to the car together?"

Clara glanced quickly up and down again. This look was peculiar to Clara. It was her substitute for a blush, and really did quite as well. Even the cleverest of us cannot blush when we want to.

"That will be very nice," she said demurely.

David waited on the veranda. He thanked his stars that Silly Billy was sleeping in, disturbed no doubt by having his mirror done up in sheets. It seemed particularly fortunate, anyway, and he said as much to Miss Sims when she joined him. Miss Sims looked surprised.

"Why?" she asked, "I thought you liked Mr. Fish?"

"So I do. Billy's an idiot but he's one of the best. All the same he has an uncanny way of guessing things. We don't want him guessing at our little comedy, he would enjoy it far too much!"

"Comedy?" Miss Sims looked pained. So palpably pained did she look that even David couldn't help seeing it. He felt that he had blundered again.

"Not that there's any chance of his doing it," he assured her hastily. "Or any one else. Thank heaven, there was no grandstand."

Clara's face was hidden now by the wide brim of her hat. She was drawing on her gloves.

"It was fortunately an entirely private performance," went on David cheerfully," but we did it well, didn't we? All the credit is yours, of course. I'd have stood there all night and never have thought of such a thing."

The hat brim drooped still lower. There was something in the droop of it which affected David like one of Clara's half-said sentences.

"What's the matter?" he inquired uneasily.

The hat brim lifted. For a second he saw her eyes, and there were tears in them.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed David in alarm, "what a silly clown I am. Of course you feel this thing more than I do. That's only natural. I shouldn't have let it go this far. I'll go right back and explain the whole thing to Mrs. Carr. She'll see reason by daylight."

"Oh no!" Clara's small but firm hand restrained him. "Don't do that!"

"But I must. I can't have you feeling this way about it."

"I—it's not *her,*" said Clara in a low voice.

"Who then? Has Billy——"

"Oh no."

"Well, then, why are you crying?"

Miss Sims denied that she was crying. But if she had been crying it wouldn't have been on account of Mrs. Carr. She didn't care a bit about Mrs. Carr and she didn't care about Mr. Fish either. But it wasn't very pleasant—to be laughed at—to be felt ashamed of—to be made to feel—— The remarks were disjointed and not very definite but it was plain enough that it had been David himself who was the cause of Clara's tears.

"But my dear girl!" the bewilderment of the unconscious culprit may be imagined, "whatever do you mean? I assure you I am horribly sorry if I have blundered in any way. If I laughed it was because I did not realise how serious the matter might seem to you. To me it appeared to be just a joke. But of course I see now that to a nice girl the position is intolerable."

"It isn't that," Clara's voice was small and trembly. "It's the way you look at it. It's hard to have to go on with it when you mind it so much."

"Me? Mind it? Why, great heaven, I don't mind it at all."

"It's the same thing!" The tremble was more pronounced now.

"Oh, the devil!" said David, but not out loud. He took off his hat and rumpled his hair.

"You hate it, you know you do," said Clara pathetically. "You don't want Mr. Fish to know. You are ashamed of it. But it won't be long. I'll look out for another boarding-house to-day."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. The idea! That would be exceedingly foolish."

"Yes, I know. But even that would be better than having you feel as you do about it."

"But I don't feel any way about it, except that I do not like to have you placed in a false position. The whole thing is dashed unfortunate. What I say is that we must not let Mrs. Carr frighten us. She's a good sort, really. I'm sure if we go in and explain quietly——"

Clara interrupted with a little gasp which David, for all his inexperience, knew threatened hysterics.

"Oh no," she cried. "I couldn't! I won't! I won't explain anything to her. I'll go away. I'll do anything rather than that."

"But you didn't do anything wrong, or even foolish."

Yes, of course, Miss Sims knew this. But all the same she couldn't and she wouldn't have anything more to say to Mrs. Carr. And as they were nearing the corner where she caught her car, it was clear that a compromise was advisable.

"Well then," said David comfortingly, "let's say nothing about it at all. Let's go ahead for a day or two. Mrs. Carr promised to say nothing about the engagement to anybody and in the meantime we can find a way out. That ought to be simple enough. You're excited, you know. There's nothing to it. We'll just sit tight."

This seemed to strike the right note. Clara's drooping hat straightened itself. Clara's dark eyes smiled a pathetic little smile. Clara's damp handkerchief was patted down into its place in her handbag.

"If you really think that would be wisest, Mr. Greig——"

"Certainly," hastily.

"And you told Mrs. Carr it was a secret?"

"Yes, I did."

"I'm so glad!"

Clara, knowing Mrs. Carr, knew exactly how that secret would be kept!

When he had handed her into the car a thoughtful silence descended upon David. This little episode was taking on a character which he had not dreamed possible.

How very strange women were; what in thunder did that girl mean by going all to pieces at the mere suggestion of the one straightforward way out of their rather silly difficulty. Why was she frightened of Mrs. Carr? Why had she seemed so frightened last night? Reviewing the scene, soberly now, David could not see why she hadn't spoken up in the first place instead of stammering and looking scared to death. He supposed there was some good reason for it, as between women, but for the life of him he couldn't see any. Well, what was done was done and perhaps the girl was right in not wishing to make more of the affair. Better to say nothing, just to let the matter drop. Anyway, his hands were tied. He couldn't go back on the girl's story until he had her permission. He couldn't stand for her turning out of her boarding house under such circumstances. A masterly inactivity on his part was clearly indicated.

This much decided, the affair began again to dwindle in importance. His step grew brisk and springy, the whistle came back to his lips. He had a long day of good work before him, why worry over trifles?

As he turned into Arbutus Street a telegraph messenger shot past him on a bicycle. The boy stopped at Mrs. Carr's and was ringing the bell as David came up the steps.

"Message for Mr. David Greig," said the telegraph boy, "sign here."

Mrs. Carr handed the envelope to David who with a quick fear at his heart, tore it open and read the few words the yellow slip contained.

There was a moment, then, when the world seemed to stand still. When it moved on again it seemed to move to a slower rhythm. Miss Sims and the silly affair of the night before had faded right out of it. Even his cherished diagrams upon the table upstairs seemed remote and without interest. The telegram said that Angus Greig was dying.

VI

ANGUS GREIG lived only two days after David's hurried return to Milhampton. Unlike a certain king, he did not take "an unconscionable time a'dying." Even death, perhaps, knew that he was a man who hated to be kept waiting.

To David, the margin of notice given, seemed cruelly short. There were so many things he had wanted all his life to say and now there was no time to say them. But to all his reproaches for not being told earlier Miss Mattie had only the one answer, "Angus did not wish it." Her devotion to the dying man was as unquestioning as it was absolute.

"But he must have wanted to see me?" said David with youthful egotism.

Miss Mattie shook her head. "He knew that you would pity him—to see him failing so! Angus could never do with pity."

"But why more then than now?"

"It is different now. There is a dignity in dying."

There was indeed, as David learned, a dignity in dying. He had never come near to death before. He had read about it; he had talked about it. He could remember supposedly clever things which he and others had said; things which, at the time, he had thought "hit it off" rather neatly; things such as "death is dramatic only to the onlooker." His own favourite remark in these discussions had been: "Personally I think we make too great a fuss about death." It had sounded very modern and philosophic.

Well, Angus at least was making no fuss. Neither did his dying appear dramatic, even to the onlooker. But, to David, death had suddenly ceased to provide opportunity for epigram. He was face to face with a stark reality. Angus was dying, what had a well-turned phrase to do with that? At best it was but a circle around a void. One moment the well loved presence would be there, beside him, responsive to his thought, sensible of his devotion, the next a veil would have swept between them—silence, blankness, mystery.

This was the dignity at the heart of death, this going out alone into the unknown. No life so tawdry or so vain but had this marvel at its end. David felt his pulse quicken and his wonder grow. Even to his happy youth the great adventure beckoned until he could almost find it in his heart to envy one who so soon would know all that the world of living men could never know until they followed him. A wonderful dignity, indeed, in dying!

Angus had never taken to his bed. That would have been a bitter thing to ask of one so little used to softness. His excuse was that he could not rest well lying down; so instead he sat in his great arm chair, and the chair itself sat, not in the big bare bedroom upstairs, but in the homely, dusty workshop where he had asked to have it taken. David had found him there with the sun and the open door and all the familiar things around. There had been no sense of shock. Weakness and wasting had not really changed the carpenter. The steady look from the deep eyes, the half reluctant, half humorous turn of the firm lips were hearteningly the same. David knew then, and never again doubted, that death is an accident of the body, an accident which frees, but cannot change, the soul.

They had one long talk. Angus had questioned and David had responded eagerly, all his reserve gone. He knew only a keen desire to give back something for all that the other man had given. It was easy now to speak of the joy of his chosen work, of the thrill of first successes, of the certainty of more success in store and of the Great Dream—the Great Dream that was no less than the empire of the air.

Angus listened and liked the boy for the confidence. Perhaps his eyes, touched already with an inner light, saw even farther and clearer than the clear eyes of youth. Perhaps he saw David, even more surely than David saw himself, a conqueror of the air. As the enthusiasm of the young inventor poured itself into words, it seemed to both of them that out through the open door in the calm, blue sky above the tree tops a vision shaped itself, a fairy, birdlike thing, winged and wonderful—the new marvel which the future, and David, would give to an earthweary world.

"It may take a lifetime," said David; "we are all only just at the beginning, but some day the roads of the air will be open. This engine that I am working on——"

Angus listened to the tale of the engine and it did not tire him as Miss Mattie feared it might. Or was it that with rest so near mere tiredness had ceased to matter?

He was especially interested in the means which David had found for managing the necessary experimental work.

"You can't do much but dream in a boarding-house bedroom," he said with his close-clipped smile.

"No, of course not," agreed David, "but you know I've written you about John Baird."

"Aye. It's John Baird that I want to hear about."

"He's a little bit like you," said David slowly, and then in quick surprise at his own words, "why did I say that? For of course he isn't like you at all except that he is about your age. But he has been exceptionally generous to me—perhaps that was what I meant. He is a little man, grim and silent, almost a recluse. But he is wonderful. His workshop is a place of miracles and he lets me work there. I am free of everything. I often wonder," thoughtfully, "why he does it?"

"Perhaps he likes you," said Angus as one who mentions a possibility.

"I don't think John Baird likes anybody."

"There's few so small as that, David."

"Oh, he isn't small. But he loves things, not people. The work of his hands—that is his one affection."

Angus looked down at his own hands, now so hopelessly idle, and sighed. But he knew that the love of one's work is a clean and wholesome thing and perhaps he was not altogether sorry that this new influence in David's life held little of sentiment.

"There's one thing," he said when David paused. "You will not need to think of money for a long time yet. You may give to your work for a while, before you make it give to you. I am not rich but there will be enough for you and Mattie. It is not your father's money. Of that I know nothing. Probably his wife's people have it. He married again, within the year, you know. Or did I ever tell you that?"

"No, I have never wished to hear of him."

"I know. I know." Angus lay silent for a moment and then went on as one who knows that he must hasten.

"David, I'm not sure I was altogether right about him. I hated him. Hate is seldom just. I couldn't forgive him for hurting her, I can't now. She had a spirit sweet as the west wind—no, I can't forgive him! I must go with that on my soul—but you—to turn a son against his father——"

"I never had a father, only you!"

"Well—it's done." With a great effort the dying man tore his mind from the thought of his heart's tragedy. "We must just leave it! But hate is a poor thing, David. Remember that, when hate is near you. It is a strong, terrible thing, and hard to lose. Maybe I'll lose it—somewhere—on the road."

He spoke very little after this, sleeping and waking in his chair and refusing the medicine which the doctor admitted would help but little in any case. They sat beside him through the next day, a perfect day of Autumn. For the most part he seemed to sleep, but toward evening he opened his eyes and looked at them in his usual grave and kindly way.

Neither of them knew just when he slipped away.

"Davy dear," said Miss Mattie, some two weeks after the funeral, "when are you going back to Toronto?"

"When are you coming with me?" asked David lazily.

The Autumn had turned suddenly cold and the two were seated before a bright fire in the sitting-room.

"I'm not coming at all," said Miss Mattie. Then hastily, before he could answer, "Davy, I don't want to go. I want to stay here just as long as I can."

"Alone?"

"Oh Davy, as if any one could be alone in Milhampton?"

David smiled. "It's not exactly an abode of hermits," he acknowledged. "Mattie, do you feel like talking about things?"

"I should like to, Davy."

Instantly she laid down her work and took off her spectacles. David found himself marvelling, as he had often marvelled during the last two weeks, at her serene composure. Her face in the firelight looked tired and sad but there was no trace of that listless, hopeless grief which so often chills and stupefies.

"I think you are wonderful!" said the boy impulsively. "I wonder if there are many women like you."

"There are many, many women," she said with a faint smile, "and they are all like me."

"Not that you could notice!" confidently. "But what I wanted to say was this: why need we sell this place at all?"

Watching her closely he felt sure it was not the firelight which caused that sudden lighting of her face! It told him more surely than any words what he wanted to know.

"It's this way," he went on, "I want to finish my year, of course, and take my degree but after that I am going to settle down to my own work. I shall need a place to work in. I can't use John Baird's place indefinitely. Later on I shall need a rather big place. You can't build aeroplanes and things on city lots. Why shouldn't I locate here? Instead of selling, why not buy? We have a fairly large space of our own and that empty corner lot can be bought for a reasonable sum. I saw old Tom Bolton, who owns it, yesterday. I don't think I could do better. As for a workshop, there is the carving shop all ready to hand, for a beginning. Why should we move when we don't need to?"

David had purposely made this speech rather long but even at that it was a moment before Miss Mattie answered. There were tears in her eyes which she could not wink away. David saw one fall on her folded hands.

"I'm afraid," she said at last, "that it's me you're thinking of, Davy dear. And you mustn't do that. Places do not matter as much as people, and you are the one who must be considered now. Angus would wish it."

"Certainly," replied David with guile. "That's why I'm telling you what I should like before I've found out what you would like yourself. Of course I don't want to be selfish. If you would like a change——"

"Oh Davy, you know I wouldn't,—Davy, you're sitting on my handkerchief!"

"It's odd," mused David, "how often people do not know what other people want."

"Some people never know because they don't care, Davy. But you were never that kind. All the same, if you were doing this for me, because I might be a bit hard to uproot, I shouldn't like it. Milhampton is a quiet town for a young man to settle down in. You might not mind it for a while but in a year or so you might feel cramped, or when you marry."

"In the bright lexicon of (progressive) youth," quoted David reprovingly, "there is no such word as 'marry.' It's been taken out. Didn't you know?"

Miss Mattie waved this away with such disdain that he felt compelled to continue. "There's absolutely no danger of that, Mattie. I never think of girls, except you."

"That's why I sometimes fear for you, Davy. If you would think of girls more you'd be safer—more prepared like."

David grinned. "Well, I haven't noticed any sweet young things coming to blows about me yet. But when I do I'll let you know. It might be a case for the exercise of tact."

Miss Mattie looked up suspiciously. "Are you making fun of tact, Davy? As for noticing—you would never notice anything! You're just plain foolish. I think I had better come to Toronto. When you talk like that you are tempting fate or perhaps," with shy sarcasm, "the word 'fate' has been taken out of the dictionary also!"

"A man makes his own fate."

"Davy dear, please don't be silly!"

"I'm being sensible. If a man who has work and health can't steer clear of silly complications——" David paused suddenly and began to poke the fire. The words "silly complications" had brought an embarrassing memory. When he began again his voice was a degree less confident. "Love," said David, "is greatly over-rated. As a factor in a man's life it has its place, but it isn't first place, perhaps not even second. Normal men marry, I admit, somewhat too soon as a rule, but the tendency to wait and get on with one's work first is growing. Not that I disapprove of marriage as marriage."

"Oh!" said Miss Mattie.

David dropped the poker. Another and more unpleasant memory had startled him.

"Mattie," he said, "what do women mean when they say 'oh'—like that?"

Miss Mattie considered. "I suppose," she said, smiling a little, "that they mean more than they care to say. Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

"What I meant when I said it was that you didn't know what you were talking about. It's rather funny, you see, to hear a young man say of the greatest force in earth or heaven that it is 'over-rated.' Davy dear, I'm just superstitious enough to warn you to touch wood!"

David laughed and shook his head. "Love in the abstract," he admitted, "is, of course, one of the greatest forces of life. But the old idea of its absolute supremacy, the grand passion idea, is fading. We are becoming more sane. Think of the lives which have been ruined through mere riotous emotion! Surely it is a waste?"

"You are thinking of Angus? You think his love for your mother wasted? Perhaps. I don't know. And anyway our thought about it makes no difference. Only you may be sure of one thing. Angus never thought it a waste. And he was the sanest man I ever knew."

"Yes. Yet he never spoke to me of love or marriage. If he had wished them for me, he would surely have said so."

"He would not," said Miss Mattie, "he had too much sense. But if you want to know what his hopes were—there's something he left for you, Davy. Come now, and I'll show it to you."

Taking the lamp from the table she led him into the workshop, now so quiet and cold and full of shadow. There, in a far corner, she moved aside a dusty screen behind which stood the carver's legacy. It was a beautiful thing; a great chest carved and fashioned by a master hand, a miracle of lovely line and exquisite workmanship. The lamplight sank softly into its dark richness.

"Do you know what it is, Davy? It is a bride's chest. It was begun for your mother and finished for your bride. He worked on nothing else for the last months of his life. But it was begun long ago. It was to have been his wedding gift to her."

David said nothing. Perhaps he would not have found speaking easy just then. Miss Mattie's soft voice went on.

"She saw it once—after she came to us, before you were born. She was so restless, never still, wandering everywhere. One day when he was out she came into his workshop, not this one but the one he had before, and saw it. She knew what it was at once, and guessed at its meaning. Poor girl, she broke down then. I never saw her cry but that once. She just bent over the unfinished work and wept her tired heart out. I think it did her good. She seemed less restless after that."

"Mattie, do you think she cared for Angus at the last?"

"No, not in that way. Not as he cared for her. Most people can only love like that once and she had given all she had to the other. You would say that that was a waste, too? But how can we be sure. They are very strange, the ways of love!"

"They seem to be, indeed," David's forefinger idly followed the lovely tracing of the chest's cover. He was thinking that of love's strangeness Miss Mattie was well qualified to speak. What had it given her? Another woman's lover to tend, another woman's child to mother!

"Mattie," said David impulsively, "if we've got to fall in love, why don't we manage to love the right person?"

"We do," said she dryly.

"Oh, you know what I mean! Why don't we use a little common sense?"

"How would you go about it, Davy dear?"

"Well, it ought to be easy. For instance a man might be careful to know a little about a girl before being much in her company. It sounds caddish but it isn't, for it's as much for her happiness as for his. In a world full of charming girls it seems sheer bad management to pick the wrong one."

"It does," agreed Miss Mattie. "But suppose that carefully chosen one should have the bad taste to prefer some one else?"

"Why, so she might! I never thought of that," said David naïvely. "The thing is really dangerous. For my part I'll not take the risk. I think I'll let you choose the lady, Mattie. Just show her my photo first and if she is still game stand her up beside this chest. The lass who measures up to its requirements is the proper lass for me—but I don't think she's born yet," added David sotto-voce.

"You like it, then?"

"Like is a poor word. It is a treasure a king might envy."

"Davy—did you ever see it before?"

David wrinkled his brows.

"Why—yes," slowly, "it does seem half-familiar. But it must have been long ago when it was quite rough. Didn't it use to stand in the far corner over there, covered up?"

Miss Mattie nodded. "Yes, it was there when you were very small. But it wasn't always covered. Do you remember anything else about it?"

"No."

She looked disappointed.

"You were too young, I suppose. But once when you were a little lad you were sent out here at dusk to bring me a handful of shavings. When you came back you were quite excited and wanted to know who the lovely lady was, the lady bending over the big box. She looked all 'light and shiny,' you said, when I asked how you could see her so plainly in the dusk. I turned back with you but of course there was no one there."

"That's odd! I mean it's odd that your telling me of it should make it all come back to me. Why, yes," with growing assurance. "I remember it quite well. It was at supper time and you were lighting the fire. I can see it all like a picture. The chest stood there," pointing, "in the shadow by the window. I was stooping for the shavings just here when I looked up and saw the lady. She was leaning over the chest with the lid raised, looking in. The illusion must have been rather good, for I remember thinking that she must have come for supper—some trick of the dusk through the long window, I suppose."

"Perhaps" said Miss Mattie, "at least that is what Angus said. But it was odd that the illusion, which you described quite well, should have been exactly like your mother as I saw her on the day she found the unfinished chest."

"But Mattie! If my mother could return, would she come back to weep above an unfinished chest?"

Miss Mattie smiled.

"She might. Perhaps the dead are quite as odd as the living. Who can tell?"

VII

MILHAMPTON folk are a leisurely lot. They do not, as a rule, catch early trains; nor does the fast express time itself to suit the town's convenience. David, catching the 6 A.M. flyer, found the station almost deserted. The platform was still wet and shining from a shower which had fallen during the night and the only people to be seen were Mickey the baggage-man and a girl who stood beside her suitcase in front of the station door. David's first impression of her was one of tall slenderness which on closer view became modified by comparison with his own height. She was not really tall, he found, but so straight, so alert that the illusion of height persisted.

It was an Autumn of tight skirts and the girl's slender figure was charming in its narrow breadth of Alice-blue serge, rounding neatly above delightful ankles and trim buckled shoes. A white blouse and Oxford coat completed the costume, and on her head she wore a white tam-o'-shanter pinned with a silver pin. David noted all these details, partly because there was nothing else on the platform to notice and partly on account of the girl's hair which was unusual to a degree.

"Spun bronze," said David to himself with involuntary admiration. It was so pleasant to look at that he hoped its owner wouldn't turn around and spoil the effect.

"Mornin', David!" Mickey lumbered up with an empty truck. "Going back to the City? Sure it's the early bird that'll be having pleasant company." A grin and a jerk of a rather dirty thumb in the direction of the bronze hair made his meaning clear.

David laughed. Mickey knew all Milhampton and was a privileged character.

"Too bad I don't know her, Mickey. She's a stranger, isn't she?"

"Stranger—her?" The old man's surprise was shrill. "Bedad, that's a poor joke," and before David could stop him he had raised his cracked voice and was calling to the girl. "Hi, Miss Rosme! Here's David Greig, disgracin' himself by saying he doesn't know ye at all."

The girl turned and David saw at once that he need not have feared the turning. Her face was even more attractive than her hair had been. It was vaguely familiar, too—where had he seen before those long, narrow eyes, the warm whiteness of the oval face, the smile which vanished mockingly into a dimple? It was all familiar as a dream is familiar. Yet, surely, any one who had ever seen this girl would hardly have forgotten her!

She moved toward him, a friendly hand outstretched, and memory, seizing upon that frank yet gracious gesture, swept the connecting links together and: "why of course I know you!" said David delightedly. "You are the little girl in the garden who had never played Pirates."

"And you," said Rosme, "are the little boy on stilts who came over the wall."

"Now thin," said Mickey benignly, "sure, I knew the two of ye was friends and all. Stranger, is ut? And her the purtiest girl this side of Ireland!"

"Well, you see," explained David, "it's a long time since we saw each other and time has played some tricks."

"Your fault entirely," said Rosme, "for you never came back."

"But I did come back; and it's your fault entirely because you weren't there."

They both laughed and David became aware that he was retaining a hand which did not belong to him. He dropped it precipitately, hoping she hadn't noticed.

"Are you—er—going away?" he asked awkwardly.

"Yes. At least, not away but back. I have been spending the week end with my cousin. I live in Toronto. Do you remember Frances?"

"Frances? Was that the tall, pale girl who came to call you in to supper? Yes, of course I remember her. I disliked her very much. She spoiled our game."

Rosme smiled. "I thought that perhaps you might have met her since. But you have been away from town even more than I have. She married Dr. Holtby. They have two children."

"And to think that these wonders have all happened over night."

"It does seem like that. And see how big and tall we've grown. We must have nibbled the wrong end of Alice's mushroom. There isn't the tiniest change in the garden for I peeped in yesterday."

"Peeped? Doesn't your Aunt—oh, I say, I'm clumsy. I remember hearing of her death some time ago——"

Rosme nodded. "Two years ago. The house is rented until a purchaser can be found."

"It was too big for you, of course."

"Me? It isn't mine. Or Frances' either. Aunt left everything to the church and to foreign missions."

Again an illusive memory stirred in David's brain.

"Did she? That's funny—I remember hearing some one say she would do something like that. And I wanted to tell you. I was quite worried—oh, I say, here's our train! May I take your suitcase? Will you let me find a seat for us together?"

"Do," said Rosme cordially.

David noticed, with a passing sense of wonder, that she betrayed no hesitancy. She did not blush or stammer or look down. Her acceptance of his company was as frank as her handshake. She settled into her seat beside him quite as a matter of course and took up the conversation exactly where he had dropped it.

"It is odd, your wanting to tell me that. And it is odder still that you did tell it, in a way. It was your going away to school and the remarks which were made about it which first made me realise what a haphazard sort of education I was getting and afraid—afraid of things which might happen if I grew up dependent upon Aunt."

"But surely your Aunt——"

"That's what every one said, *'surely your Aunt,'* but somehow I felt sure she wouldn't. When Frances defied her and got married I saw the positive pleasure she had in cutting her off. And, of the two, she liked Frances better. So I wanted to be ready. From that time on I wanted only one thing, to be independent. You can't realise it, of course, but children know the bitterness of dependence quite as much as grown-ups. So I kept on at school until I got my teacher's certificates and while I was still at Normal, Aunt died. She left me two hundred dollars."

"You're joking?"

"No. Although it was rather a joke. I often wondered why she did it. A shilling would have been so much more artistic. But Aunt never cared for art. The two hundred came in very handy. I finished my year at Normal and took a country school."

"You were a school-teacher?" in surprise.

"The certificate said so."

"Well—er—I'm sure the children were pleased. Lucky kids!"

"They were." Rosme displayed her tiny dimple. "It was the trustees who weren't!"

They both laughed.

"What was the matter with them?" asked David belligerently.

"Um-m, can't say, I'm sure. I think they had silly ideas about efficiency. So, in the words of the story-teller, it became necessary for me to find another situation. Do you like chocolates?"

David didn't like chocolates but he took one from the box she offered him, gratefully, and ate it without flinching. Was it possible, he wondered, to see right into a girl's eyes without seeming rude?

This girl's eyes were so curious, he would like to be sure of their colour. They were long eyes, beautifully shaped, but their colour eluded him. What colour is supposed to go with bronze hair? And what hopeless chumps those school trustees must have been! It wouldn't be every day that they'd find a girl with eyes like that willing to teach in their old school.

"It's a shame!" he burst out, "you shouldn't have had to teach at all."

Rosme looked up from choosing a chocolate. Her eyes opened widely and looked directly into his. He could see their colour! At least he might have, if he hadn't been too confused to look.

"What an idea!" said the owner of the eyes. "Why shouldn't I teach? Don't be silly."

But in David's mind an ingrained prejudice, combined with visions of a drooping Miss Sims and her fight against a hard world, caused him to shake his head. "It isn't right," he declared, "women and girls were never intended for that kind of struggle. It's too hard."

"It isn't hard at all," said Rosme calmly. "Have another chocolate?"

David had another chocolate. It was ginger and he hated ginger. But he ate it.

"You talk," resumed Rosme kindly, "as if you had just wandered in from the eighteenth century. A kind of left-over, so to speak. Where were you when women picked up their hats and walked out?"

"Did they walk out?" asked David. "I hadn't noticed it."

"You wouldn't. It didn't make much difference to anybody, except the women."

"Did the little girls go, too?"

"Meaning me? Certainly."

"But where did they walk to? And did they take their Sunday hats as well as their every day ones? I ask for information."

"You won't get it as long as you ask in a spirit of levity."

"Seriously, then? Don't think I don't believe in women's rights. I do. I think a woman ought to have everything she wants. Right on the spot. All she has to do is to ask me."

"Exactly," said Rosme, "that is the whole point at issue."

"What is?"

"The asking you. Supposing a woman doesn't want to ask—you?"

"That," said David, "is barely conceivable."

Again their eyes met and again they laughed.

"I'll have to be educated, that's evident," admitted David. "I don't mind. There is still room up aloft for a new idea or two. But honestly, I have always thought it a hardship for girls to have to work."

"Perhaps some girl made you think so?"

This was so near the mark that David blushed and, being furious with himself for blushing, blushed more. Rosme watched the blush with much enjoyment.

"Perhaps some girls do find it a hardship," she admitted magnanimously. "But most of them like it. I do."

"Is it literary work?" ventured David. He had noticed a note book and pencil in the bag with the chocolates.

"Literary work?" Rosme reflected a moment and her dimple stole out. "Why, yes. I suppose you might call it literary work. There's a lot in a name."

"A journalist?"

"Not *exactly*. Although some of my efforts appear in the daily press."

David, who in common with many people who do not write, had a vague respect for the printed word, began to feel properly impressed.

"I should think you'd be very good at it," he told her generously.

"Oh, I am! Some of my things are lovely. Only," with a sigh, "they never will use the loveliest."

"Why?"

"They seem to like the practical, everyday things best. Inspirations are hardly ever practical. Madam Rameses is the only one who appreciates mine. She does it by the aid of her subconscious mind."

"Really! Is she a literary person, too?"

"No, she is a spiritualist."

"Great Scott!"

"You don't approve?" sweetly.

David stammered that he didn't know anything about spiritualists.

"Oh, you don't need to know anything about them in order to disapprove! You do it on principle."

"Well then, on principle, I do."

Rosme looked at him out of the corners of her long eyes and laughed.

"I thought you would. But in reality, you'd like Madam Rameses. I do. She's a dear. It's a nice name, don't you think—Rameses? One can get such suitable names when one chooses them oneself. Madam's real name is Mrs. Plumber. Quite impossible. She said it made her clients think of drains. There is no psychic suggestion about a drain. But Rameses makes them think of Egypt and the Pharaohs, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see. But I hope——"

David found himself unable to put his hope into suitable words. So Rosme, serenely interrupting, went on.

"She is a most interesting person. Really interesting, not just on the outside. I live with her, you know. She intended to keep a boarding-house but it ended by her keeping just me. The spiritualism is a side line. I love her. I read her all my things which they won't have at the office. Do have another chocolate."

"Thanks. I think it would be wiser not."

"Don't they agree with you? Madam Rameses says I may eat all the chocolates I wish. They have no effect at all, she says, on my astral body and that is the only thing that matters. Astral bodies never get fat."

But David didn't join in her laugh this time. Already his interest in his young companion had become so—so brotherly that he felt worried.

"It doesn't seem to be just the best kind of place to board," he murmured uneasily.

"No? But then, you don't board there."

David, perforce, grew crimson under the delicate snub.

When he regained his composure she was talking of indifferent subjects and continued to talk of them until the approach of the city suburbs told them that their journey was nearly at an end. Then they both felt sorry that they had wasted their time. David, especially, remembered with a start that he didn't even now know the colour of her eyes, or her address, or even her whole and proper name. Why had he been so foolishly officious? No wonder she had felt offended. The case was desperate.

"I board," he said hastily, and apropos of nothing, "with Mrs. Carr at 9 Arbutus Street."

"I hope," replied Rosme, "that Mrs. Carr is a proper person."

"My Cousin Mattie chose her," said David meekly.

Rosme permitted her dimple to return.

"How nice! But, being a man, you would naturally need some one with discretion to choose for you. Do you expect to be met?"

"Met?"

"At the station?"

"Oh, I say, don't be hard on a fellow. Mayn't I carry your suitcase?"

Rosme drew on her gloves and appeared to weigh the matter, or, perhaps, the suitcase.

"It's a heavy one," she decided. "Yes, you may carry it to the car."

"And may I come some time to see—Madam Rameses?"

This was handsome reparation. Rosme smiled.

"The Madam never turns true seekers away," she replied demurely. "Her private circle is held on Wednesday at eight."

"And the address?" eagerly.

"To—ron—to!" shouted the brakesman. It was the third and last call. The train slowed rapidly. Passengers stood up, dusted themselves and lifted their hand baggage down from the holders. His question was engulfed in the confusion of arrival.

"I take the car from the upstair entrance," said Rosme. "Come along."

They hurried down the steps and up the steps and into the big waiting-room of the station. David hoped that here she might pause a moment. His whole mind was now upon the matter of the address. But Rosme appeared, most unkindly, to be in a hurry.

"It's just nine o'clock," she said over her shoulder. "I shall be able to be down at the office by ten."

"Where is the office?" began David. And just then the catastrophe happened.

Two people detached themselves from the crowd in the waiting-room.

"Oh, there he is!" thrilled a vibrant treble voice and Miss Clara Sims, supported closely in the rear by Mr. William Carter Fish, advanced with every sign of pleasurable emotion upon the astonished travellers.

"Oh David!" exclaimed Miss Sims with a break in her much too audible voice, "I am so glad."

The blow was staggeringly complete. David dropped the suitcase! Any remark which he may have made was fortunately drowned by its rattle on the pavement.

Rosme, who had paused in polite wonder, needed no more than a second to see—what was so very apparent.

With a murmured word of thanks and a charming nod of her white capped head, she picked up the ill-used suitcase and slipped away into the crowd.

"We thought we would surprise you!" said Silly Billy beaming.

VIII

"DO you mean to tell me," said William Carter Fish seated, in judgment, upon David's one comfortable chair, "do I gather from your remarks that the whole thing is a frame-up?"

"You do not," said David indignantly. "I never suggested such a thing. What I want you to understand is that there has been an annoying mistake."

"That," declared Billy definitely, "is impossible. Nobody could be quite so infantile as to make a mistake about their being engaged. One either is or one isn't. I've been engaged and I know. Please remember that you're talking to a man of experience. Believe me, old scout, it's either a true bill or a frame-up."

"Then who framed it?"

"Aha!" cried Mr. Fish dramatically, "let the villain declare himself!"

"I have told you my story," said David doggedly. "There's positively nothing more to it. The girl was frightened on the night of the storm. She ran in here and Mrs. Carr saw her and for some occult reason turned decidedly nasty. We were on the edge of a scene when Miss Sims, on the spur of the moment——"

"You're sure about the spur of the moment?"

"What else is possible?"

"You are very simple, my young friend, but proceed."

"Well, she just said that we were engaged. As a reason, you see, for coming to me. I thought it was very smart of her to think of it and it had a miraculous effect on our respected landlady. Lambs could not have been milder than she was after that."

"Quite so."

"Next morning I wanted to explain the whole thing——"

"What did you hope to accomplish by that?"

"I thought Mrs. Carr would be more reasonable in the morning."

Mr. Fish shook a wise head.

"Not a chance!" he decided. "They never are."

"But Miss Sims—well, she seemed to agree with you. So I thought the only other thing to do was to sit tight and let the whole thing die a natural death. People have been engaged before and got over it."

"They have," Billy's voice held deep feeling, "but only if the lady recovers first."

"You mean?"

"I mean that it's as plain as the nose on your face that your party of the first part didn't wish to get over it."

"But the whole thing was a—a makeshift. There was never any intention——"

"Not on your part, son, but on hers, yes. Believe your Uncle Billy."

"I can't. It's preposterous. Why, we had never spoken a word to each other beyond the ordinary give and take, a walk or so, an occasional evening at the theatre——"

"Is that as true as all the rest of your evidence?" in Billy's best judicial manner.

"I swear it!"

"The witness is sworn. But all that doesn't make any difference anyway. You did flirt with her a little, you know. Very mildly. Or she thought you did. The fact is that you can't say 'good-day' to a girl of that type without flirting. You can't say I haven't told you all this before. The benefit of my experience has always——"

"Oh, shut up!"

Billy arose, the picture of dignity under insult. "Consider me shut. I shall now retire."

The grace of his retirement, however, was considerably marred, as it had been once before, by a collision in the doorway.

"I don't see why you are always coming in when I am coming out," fumed Billy belligerently.

"Were you going out?" asked Willard politely. "Don't let me detain you. Hello David! I heard you were back. Terribly sorry to hear the bad news. Very sudden, wasn't it?"

The two shook hands with the embarrassment common to all Britons where serious grief or joy is the matter in question.

"It was sudden to me," said David, "because he would not allow me to be told how serious it was until the last moment."

"Hard luck!" said Willard quietly. And with that and the exchange of a glance they both felt that generous sympathy had been tendered and appreciated. Then with a look toward Billy, which seemed surprised to find him still there, Willard settled himself comfortably in the freshly vacated chair and helped himself to a cigarette. With the first puff he looked keenly at his friend who, seated forlorn on the edge of the bed, seemed anything but glad of his scrutiny.

"Don't go away mad, Billy," said David. "Have a chair. I mean have a table!"

"Thanks. I'll have a radiator. As I was saying when Mr. Buttinsky interrupted——"

"No, no!" exclaimed David hastily.

"What? Oh, don't worry, he knows. Everybody knows. I've been trying to tell you that for the last half hour."

"Was it supposed to be a secret?" asked Willard.

"It wasn't supposed to 'be' at all. Murray, it looks as if I were in the deuce of a mess. Tell him, Billy, and cut it short for the whole thing makes me sick."

Thus adjured, Mr. Fish used to the utmost his powers as narrator and succeeded in giving the newcomer a fair statement of the case and a summary of the discussion up until his arrival. When he had finished, a thin smile played about Willard's well-cut but sarcastic mouth.

"Clever girl," he remarked briefly.

"Just what I said," affirmed Billy cheerfully.

Willard, who habitually ignored Billy without any perceptible injury to that person, paid no attention to this observation.

"I remember her," he said to David. "Saw her on the stairs one morning. Quite striking—only a little too much of everything, especially eyes. You aren't a millionaire by any chance, are you, Greig!"

Poor David only looked the more bewildered.

"If you had money it is easy to understand her game. But as you show no signs of undue affluence there must be another reason—your beaux yeux perhaps."

"Not for Clara!" put in Billy. "Something more substantial, please."

"It must be that the lady has foresight and believes that you are a coming man. I shouldn't be surprised, either," continued Willard, thoughtfully with a glance at the littered table, "if you did come along a bit——"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" cried the miserable David.

"Yes, of course,—modesty and all that. Great minds are always simple."

"Cut it out!"

"With pleasure. But you can see, can't you, that this thing has been engineered deliberately. In the first place it is very evident that there was no burglar in her room that night."

"Why?"

"Because burglars do not burglar in great storms. Too dangerous, every one awake. But, if by chance that rule were disregarded, with all that flood of rain there must have been marks of his feet and drips from his clothes on the carpet. Mrs. Carr appreciated that point. So, if we dismiss the burglar, why the lady's agitated entrance?"

"She may have been just frightened of the storm, and seeing by the light under my door that I was still up——" David paused distractedly. The memory he had of Miss Sims' visit did not seem to tally very well with this explanation.

Willard, the acute, shook his head.

"No. In that case she would have gone into one of the women's rooms or hid her head under the bed clothes. Another point; you say it was only a minute from her coming in until you opened the door and ran into Mrs. Carr. Is that correct?"

"Yes, two minutes at the utmost."

"Then when she ran into your room, Mrs. Carr was already at the head of the stairs and Miss Sims must have known it."

"By jove, you're right!" gasped Billy. "She makes enough noise for a regiment of infantry, and the stairs *squeak*."

Willard paid no attention. "Point three," he continued, "why the embarrassing dumbness at the beginning of the interview? Miss Sims is not a child and she is not shy. If her story had been straight, or for that matter if it had been crooked and she had wished to make Mrs. Carr believe it, she would have acted quite differently. Can't you *see* that, David?"

David, who subconsciously had always wondered about this point, found nothing to say.

"I think it is plain enough that she was not averse to the little scene which followed. And her pat little speech about the engagement was not an inspiration of the moment——"

"Exactly what I said!" from Billy.

"—but a rehearsed effect. By the way, where was the roommate?"

"Away for the night with a friend."

"Just so. Everything tallies. I'm afraid you have been 'had,' David."

"And that is the verdict of the judge and jury in open court assembled," said Billy solemnly.

David's hair was rumpled and his face was rather white.

"Well," he spoke slowly, "I can't agree with you. There are points that I do not understand. But I don't believe the girl capable of a low-down, premeditated scheme like that. There's no motive, for one thing. I believe she acted and spoke without thinking and, before she realised what had happened, had got so tangled up that she couldn't get out; and I was not here to help her. So she took the easy way and let every one say what they liked. It's evident that Mrs. Carr told the whole house that we were engaged and the whole house told every one else. How did you hear it, Murray?"

"Dropped into a lecture. Every one down there knows it."

"I didn't!" declared Billy as David's accusing eyes sought him out.

"What is the mistaken lady's attitude now?" asked Willard with his thin smile.

Mr. Fish began to giggle and turned it off with a cough. David grew very red.

"She—she came to the station," he stammered.

"Yes," burst in Billy. "She got an hour off from the store to do it, and asked me to go with her. Gadzooks! She had me on toast. I believed every word she said. She was so sweet, so shy and yet so eager——"

The pillow, thrown with deadly aim by David, temporarily obscured the fishly ones further remarks.

"I gather that she is taking it seriously, then?"

"Apparently so," said David with effort. "I tell you, Murray, I feel like a hateful cad."

"Well, it seems to me that the situation is simple. You must allow us to pass on your explanation that the whole thing is a mistake. Then you simply leave this boarding house and drop the girl. People will draw their own conclusions."

"Yes," David's lips shut tightly, "and in a case like this their conclusions are not going to help the girl any."

"You can't prevent that."

"I've got to."

"Don't be absurd, Greig! Do you want to tie yourself to a girl who has manipulated a trap like this? Do you want, at the present stage, to tie yourself to any one?"

"No, I do not."

"Then what can you do?"

"I can do what I intended to do before I went away. I can wait a week or so and then, by mutual consent, our 'engagement' can be terminated."

"David," said Willard, "you may as well face it. This engagement will never be broken by mutual consent and every hour you permit it to continue you are making the repudiation of it more impossible."

The two looked at each other in silence. David knew the value of his friend's keen and selfish mind. He knew that, as far as his own interests were concerned, he was getting good advice, yet he knew, just as surely, that he couldn't take it. As for Willard, he was, for a wonder, sincerely concerned. If he cared for any one in the world outside of himself he cared for David Greig. What the attraction was, he could not have said. But there was an attraction quite outside of any combination of good qualities which David may have possessed. As a matter of fact he was often impatient of these same good qualities. He was impatient of them now. It seemed incredible to him that David should hesitate for an instant in a matter so vital. What did a girl matter? Especially a scheming Miss like this one? She could, he felt, be disregarded with perfect propriety.

"I think we are making too much of it," said David with forced lightness. "But even if we're not, I can't let a girl down like that."

Willard shrugged his shoulders. "Well, every man has my leave to go to the devil in his own way. See you to-morrow. By the way, how is old John?"

John Baird, referred to by the disrespectful epithet of "Old John," was the strongest link in the friendship between David and Willard.

It had been through Murray that David had first met the old inventor. Murray, who was John Baird's nephew, had given one of those casual introductions which are often so infinitely powerful in the shaping of destiny. He had meant no particular kindness by it, but David's gratitude was measured by the result rather than by the intention.

"I haven't seen him since I returned," answered David, "I'm going down there to-day."

"Well, so long. You might let me know if you think the old one will stand for another 'touch.' Say Billy, where is that book you promised to lend me?"

"I didn't promise to—ouch!" Mr. Fish's protest was cut short by a sharp, though surreptitious pinch. "I mean, I don't know which book you want."

"Come along and I'll show you."

"I don't want any book, bonehead," explained Willard kindly when they were alone in the hall. "I just want to know if you are well acquainted with the engaging Clara?"

"Rather! She has a little friend——"

"I don't care about her little friend. Do you know her well enough to introduce some one?"

"Of course."

"Because I should like to meet her."

"What for?" asked Billy, thoroughly surprised.

"It doesn't matter, does it?"

"Yes, it does."

"Well then, let us say that, for once and by way of a change, I want to help some one who refuses to help himself."

"You mean you want to be nice to her on account of David?"

"Entirely on account of David."

"Well, it could easily be managed. I'll arrange a little party."

"Thanks!"

"Rummy chap, that!" mused Billy as he watched the retreating form of Willard down the stairs. "Must be sound in spots. Otherwise why——"

Like many of Billy's self-questionings, this one remained unformed and unanswered.

IX

ANY one who has followed this history so far may think that too many chapters begin with getting out of bed in the morning. Well, we make no apology. Things do begin that way. The newness of every day is such a commonplace phenomenon that we miss the wonder of it. Yet think! Of all the millions of days which make up the million years of the aeons this day which begins when we get out of bed in the morning is the only day which has never been lived by anybody! It lies before us, a tiny fleck of time, virgin as yet of the touch of man or angel. Perhaps in this knowledge lies the source of that imperishable optimism which makes us feel so able to do things in the morning? If so, it is fortunate that our having done nothing special yesterday seems to leave our hopefulness unimpaired.

Rosme loved the morning. She always woke suddenly and completely and when she woke she got up. Usually, that is—this morning was different. It wasn't that she was sleepy or that the room was cold; it wasn't for any particular reason, but just because she had a feeling which she did not analyse that there were things, important things, to think over. One can think with great comfort in a warm bed. Rosme tossed back her hair (it looked rather wonderful against the white pillow) peeped at her watch and drew the blankets up to her chin.

"Now I can think," she decided luxuriously.

Does anybody think when they decide that they are going to? What Rosme really meant was, "Now I can remember," for immediately her unleashed mind raced back through the events of the last few days, pausing only when it reached Milhampton station on a fine, crisp morning after rain.

We have already visited that station upon that same morning and we know all the little trifles that happened there. But then we were with David and now we are with Rosme. Instead of a straight young girl with bronze hair, we see a young man sitting on a baggage truck. He is an upstanding young man with an arresting face which, at first, we cannot decide to call either homely or handsome but which is all the more fascinating on that account. We note particularly the eyes which are deep set and very grey. This young man speaks and we like his voice. We like his voice very much—all kinds of disconnected memories crowd in here—things which the young man said and the way he looked when he said them—a confusion of pictures piling one on another—of the young man's face as he ate a ginger chocolate which he didn't like, of his expression when speaking so briefly of his recent loss, of how he looked when discussing the rights of women, of his trick of rumpling his hair, his habit of blushing—we find Rosme's memory dwelling on all these trifles and many more, especially the awkward zeal with which he had tried to discover her address. Then, with a bound, it cuts the confusion and presents a very clear-set vision of the arrival in the waiting-room.

That girl!

That girl with her too red lips and her heavy lidded eyes, the ultra fashion of her dress, the slight exaggeration of her hat—her whole indefinite yet damning air of being not the real thing but something just as good! This picture was clearest of all, although Rosme had seen it only in the merest flash—the girl's hand on David's arm with its insufferable air of possession, her "O David!"

What did it mean?

In her wise little head, Rosme was afraid that she knew what it meant. Girls, even girls unrestrained by the dictates of good taste, do not behave so obviously in public places unless they are conscious of a position solid enough to warrant it. Only an engaged girl might act so, but—David Greig engaged to a girl like that!

She had caught a glimpse of his face as she picked up the dropped suitcase and the thought of it now brought out a reluctant dimple. Amazement, chagrin, fury, but chiefly amazement, had left him staring like an owl caught by sunlight. Why had he been so unprepared? Rosme couldn't answer that, but it opened out new avenues for speculation. Perhaps he wasn't engaged after all; perhaps there was a misunderstanding somewhere? Perhaps it had been a practical joke? This last held an element of possibility. The girl in the big hat had not been alone. Over her shoulder Rosme had caught sight of a familiar face, a face with a mouth which could have belonged to no one save Mr. William Carter Fish, and Mr. Fish, Rosme felt, was capable of any silliness. She had met that gentleman before, had known him, in fact, as the latest and fast vanishing satellite of Miss Mary Fox, once a schoolmate of Rosme's in Milhampton. For a brief period, Miss Fox had found Mr. Fish useful. "Not anything like so silly as he looks, dear," she had told Rosme. "Quite a duck, really, and knows no end of nice boys."

Was David Greig one of the "nice boys," Rosme wondered. If so, perhaps Mary had already become acquainted with him. She might know all about the girl at the station. But curiously enough this possibility was not pleasant. Rosme rather hoped that Mary did not know David at all. Mary was a dear girl but she was certainly a flirt. Dangerously pretty, too, with her flaxen hair and round childish face with its air of blossoming innocence. A half formed resolution of calling on Mary faded! Probably the episode at the station had meant just nothing at all. It is often so, in books. People who might have been jolly good friends are estranged through such blind trusting to appearances. She, Rosme, would not be so foolish. If Mr. Greig, when he found out her address, desired to come to see her she would act exactly as if nothing had happened. He would probably explain, if explanation were necessary!

By this time Rosme's wish had so fathered her thought that she had begun to wonder what she had been making such a fuss about. A man can't be engaged without knowing it and Mr. Greig had certainly not looked like an engaged man—not that she cared if he were engaged. She only wanted to be friends and one can have a perfectly good friendship with an engaged person. Certainly. Why not? Well, of course, it isn't quite the same. There is a certain flatness—Rosme sighed.

The sigh proved the end of her reverie for a certain small person, who had been waiting outside the door for some such indication of wakefulness, pushed delightedly into the room and plunged, head first like a small porpoise, into the warmest place in the bed. The ease of her plunging spoke of long practice.

"Infant! How did you get out of bed?"

"I climbed out. But I waited till you woked. It was a long time—feel my feets!"

"Ouch!" exclaimed Rosme, "they're like ice. "You're a naughty girl!"

"I'm good now," in an injured voice.

"Lie still, then."

"Rosme," in a wheedling voice, "will you tell me Peter Rabbit?"

There was no answer. Rosme was trying to recapture her interrupted musings.

"Are you asleep, Rosme?" Small fingers explored the corners of the girl's closed eyes. "Please don't be asleep! Rosme! Turn round!" The fingers sought and found a convenient handle in Rosme's nose.

"Oh, baby, don't!"

"Does it hurt?" with interest. "Will you tell me about Peter, quick, before Granny comes?"

"I'm so tired of Peter, Infant!"

Two childish eyes opened widely in surprise at the foolishness of this remark.

"But it's not you, it's me," said the Infant reasonably.

Rosme laughed and gave in. But the delay had been fatal.

"Rosme, is the Infant in there?" asked an enquiring voice from the hallway. "Why Rosme," as the owner of the voice followed it into the room. "Aren't you up yet, child? Do you know what time it is?"

The first sight of Madam Rameses was always a shock, especially to any one who had heard her speak before seeing her. Sound creates an illusion of form, and the form created by the voice of Madam was so different from the reality that momentary confusion was inevitable. Madam's voice was sweet, even haunting, Madam's appearance was—well, striking. She was a large woman with a square cut, masculine face and a faintly shaded upper lip. Her brow was broad and unsoftened by the grey hair which was dragged back from it and worn short in a fashion resembling a Dutch cut. Only the eyes seemed to claim remote kinship with the voice, for they were mild and kind with an expression of appeal, almost of timidity, curiously at odds with the rugged face they graced.

Though it was so early in the morning Madam was dressed for the day in a trim, gentlemanly shirtwaist and a tight, short skirt. She practiced an habitual neatness which was a continual shock to those "seekers" whose preconceived idea of a clairvoyant and medium was of something thin and hazy in kimonos. She wore boots, too, although every one knows that slippers are the proper psychic wear. Slippers which slip, belts which refuse to stay down and hair which declines to stay up are full of soulful suggestion. But Madam would have none of them. Her cuffs and collar were as white and prim as those of a hospital nurse and her skirt never sagged. A woman of curious contradictions was Madam Rameses, spiritualist.

"No, I don't know the time, and please don't tell me," entreated Rosme. "I'll hurry."

"Well, breakfast is waiting. You shouldn't indulge the Infant with stories, Rosme, it is only teaching her to climb her crib."

"She hasn't told me a single story!" wailed the Infant.

But her grandmother paid no attention. She was watching Rosme with a curious expression of indecision.

"What's the matter?" asked Rosme, who knew this look well.

"Nothing at all important. But I have a short message for you. Do you care to see it? I know you have no faith, my dear," she went on without waiting for an answer, "but I feel it my duty when a message comes through to pass it on whether the recipient laughs at it or not."

"I'm not laughing," protested Rosme with some truth. "I can't laugh with a tooth brush in my mouth."

"I refer, of course, to your mental attitude," said Madam mildly. "There was no circle last evening. The message came through by automatic writing while I was preparing for bed."

She spread upon the girl's dressing table two fairly large sheets of rough scribbling paper loosely covered with large irregular writing which straggled anywhere across their surface. The script was so bad as to be almost illegible but Rosme had seen it often enough to be able to read it with some ease.

"Let Rosme tell—to be careful of——"

The blank spaces were quite indecipherable and so were two or three words which seemed to complete the message.

"It is unfortunate," said Madam in her charming voice, "that I was unable to get the remainder of the message more clearly. I am afraid you may find it obscure."

Rosme laughed.

"Well," she admitted, "if I knew whom I was to tell and what I was to tell him, and why he should be careful and what of, the meaning might be slightly clearer.

"Sometimes," went on Madam, her light, blue eyes growing dreamy, "the subconscious mind supplies these deficiencies in the script. I have known seekers to translate perfectly a half finished message which to me was perfect nonsense. It is wonderful what the merest suggestion will do."

"It is," said Rosme. "That is why I prefer not to let it do it."

Madam looked faintly puzzled. "I fear you are prejudiced, my dear. However, there is the message. Shall I tell Maggie to pour your coffee?"

"Yes, please. I'll only be a moment now. Who's going to dress the Infant?"

"Maggie will do that. The water in the taps is not warm enough yet. Did I tell you that I had a message to stop the cold baths?"

"No!" said Rosme, peering through the cloud of her hair.

"Yes, a doctor, Cornelius Brown, who passed over early in the eighteenth century, has sent a warning. Too great a shock to the system. Surprising, don't you think?"

"Not at all. Early in the eighteenth century cold baths would have shocked many systems. All the same I agree with Dr. Brown about the Infant. I have always thought cold baths for her rather heroic."

"Yes," uneasily. "I thought so too. But I began, you remember, on account of a message from—there's the bell! I'll have your coffee ready." With a word of caution to the Infant to wait for Maggie, Madam Rameses hurried out.

"Now," said a small but determined voice, "you can tell me about Peter."

"But if I tell you about Peter, baby, I won't have time to drink my coffee."

"Will that hurt you in your tummick?"

"It might."

The infant sighed a sigh of ineffable sacrifice.

"Angel!" cried Rosme, picking her up for a final hug, "You shall have Peter to-morrow and the Flopsy Bunnies too, and maybe Jemima Puddleduck, but now I must fly!"

Yet even in her hurry she paused a moment to glance once more at the scribbled message"—was that a "D" at the beginning of the undecipherable word? It might be a "D." But it might just as well be anything else. Rosme was quite able to smile at her own absurdity!

X

ROSME ate her breakfast in record time that morning, conscious of a kindly scrutiny from across the table. Whatever Madam Rameses' professional abilities may have been (and with these Rosme felt she had nothing to do), she certainly possessed an uncanny power of receiving impressions from other people. By the time Rosme decided to tell Madam anything she usually found that Madam already knew. It was a state of things not without its conveniences—usually. But this morning Rosme ate her breakfast in a hurry not all attributable to the fact that she was late.

Perhaps Madam knew this, too, for there was a smile in her light, blue eyes as she watched the girl. She was very fond of Rosme; loved her in fact with the timid, half-hesitating love of one to whom love has not been gracious. Madam Rameses, otherwise Mrs. Plumber, born Anna Wilkes, had led a life which had been singularly loveless. Left motherless when a very little girl, it would have been infinitely better had she been left fatherless too; for Joe Wilkes, the father, had been at best a bully and at worst a brute. Little Anna early learned fear and hate from him and would have suffered actual abuse had she not possessed, unconsciously, a weapon which he feared from the depths of his ugly, superstitious soul. Anna was a quiet, somewhat stupid child ,without any of the ordinary prettinesses of childhood ("ugly little devil," her father called her) and her strange faculty of seeing more than other people saw helped to keep her solitary even in the midst of a kind-hearted community. Mothers of more ordinary children looked at her askance. They were sorry for the child but—one has to think of one's own, and there was no doubt that Joe Wilkes' Anna was a bit odd. Even the children themselves did not take to her. She was too quiet to be a good playmate and she could never return any of their childish favours by inviting them to her home. Her father would allow no children inside his gate.

So Anna fought her silent way into girlhood through what agonies of loneliness no one ever knew. She learned to dread the strange "sight" which made her different from those around her. Desperately she tried to put all that part of herself away, to hide it, to smother it, to kill it if she could; and her square chin, outward semblance of an inborn stubbornness helped her. Only with Joe Wilkes did she use her curious power and often she protected herself against his brutality by a use of it which cowed him utterly—and made him hate her worse than ever!

When she was sixteen, a well grown, homely girl, Joe Wilkes, at that time a contractor in a small way, fell from a scaffold while inspecting a building and was instantly killed. With his death, a great weight was removed from Anna's life. The world seemed kinder, the air purer, now that she was alone. When his affairs were settled it was found that she owned the cottage she lived in and the ground on which it stood, its apple and cherry trees, its useful bit of kitchen-garden and its roses and lilac trees in front. There was a little money in the bank.

Anna drew a long sigh of relief and looked around her. She was not afraid of life. She was young and every one was kind. The old rumours of her "queerness" had almost died out or were disregarded. There were good friends ready to help the orphan girl. Things looked well for Anna, but calamity was again just around the corner.

In an evil moment, Anna Wilkes met Richard Plumber. He was a man of twice her age, of cheap, good looks and easy manner. He lived in a near-by town where the door of his office bore the word "Broker," a most suitable name if one may be permitted to play upon words. No one knew exactly what he broke, for the pieces were skilfully hidden.

In this man, poor loveless Anna thought she had found love. She was not naturally clever and at this crisis her abnormal faculty for "seeing clear" deserted her. She was an easy prey. When he said he loved her she believed him. When he said that she was beautiful she looked into her mirror through a mist of happy tears and thought that perhaps it might be true.

The story is too sordid to dwell upon. From the standpoint of Mr. Richard Plumber it was a most satisfacfory affair. He got the pretty cottage with the useful bit of garden; he got the bit of money in the bank and he got an excellent housekeeper to whom he need pay no wages and on whom he did not need to waste the time required for deeds of ordinary courtesy. One little child was born to them and here at last Anna found love. The baby was a sturdy little girl with her father's good looks and, as was to appear later, his selfish soul. But to her mother, more homely now than ever, she was a bit of heaven.

For a while Anna was happy but that misfortune which seems to dog the steps of some with pitiless zeal, was not yet satisfied. With the disappearance of Anna's bit of money and the money from the sale of the cottage, the brokerage business disappeared too. Money grew scarce—and scarcer. A frightened look came into Anna's eyes; a look which never afterwards wholly left them. Then one morning, Richard Plumber, husband and father, was nowhere to be found. He had followed the money and the brokerage business into the limbo of lost articles. He never came back.

Anna Plumber's memory was confused about the time which came afterwards. She supported herself in various ways, including the taking in of washing, and managed to rub along somehow until the baby's infancy was passed. Then to her dismay she found her own strength failing. With poor health she began to "see" again and, as if fortune had been lying in wait, it was just at that time that she became known to the Rev. Jasper Holmes, a believer in the occult and an eager, if somewhat unstable, psychical researcher. To the Rev. Jasper, who had retired from active ministry in order to give more time to his new hobby, Mrs. Plumber was a "find." Was she not that rare thing, a natural medium, an unprofessional, a woman without guile, against whose honesty no word could be said? The little man thrilled all over! and this marvel was taking in washing for a living! Well, the Rev. Jasper could stop all that. He had money and it was always easy to get more for his experiments. The rich are especially subject to psychic spasms.

Anna Plumber "sat" for the Rev. Jasper and his friends and began to find life easy again. She took the change in a bewildered sort of way. She could not see just why or how she was earning this money but it was pleasant to earn it so easily. She was so horribly tired!

One night as she sat beside her table close to her little Anna's bed, thinking of nothing at all, she was astonished to find that her right hand, in which she held a pencil had begun to write quite of its own accord. The writing was large, sprawling and rapid, quite unlike her own painstaking efforts. Fascinated she watched it for a moment and then grew frightened. When she grew frightened the hand stopped. The pencil fell out of it and rolled to the floor.

Shaking a little, Anna picked up the written sheets—she could not read a word of the writing. And yet, it did not look quite like gibberish either. Much perturbed, she spoke of her curious experience to the Rev. Jasper next day. He was much excited.

"Automatic writing!" he exclaimed. "An undoubtedly genuine case. The Society will be delighted. We shall go ahead very rapidly now."

"But," said Anna, "no one can read the writing."

"That is not unusual in the first experiments. You will see that the characters greatly improve with practice. Presently we shall be able to read it with facility.

"But," said Anna, "what *is* it?"

This was a poser for her patron. He did not know just what it was. "That," he said, "is one of the things we wish to discover. Some say that it is a part of the 'self' of the medium which writes—a part which is ordinarily below the level of every-day consciousness, a kind of inner or subconscious 'self' which is mysteriously aware of many things hidden from the ordinary conscious mind."

"Oh," said Anna looking puzzled.

"Others believe," he continued, "that the writing hand is controlled more or less directly by some intelligence other than that of the medium; by a disembodied spirit, in fact, and that this is another agency by which we may be able to get in touch with those who have gone before. In other words it is simply a different manifestation of the same power which takes advantage of your trances to communicate by the spoken word."

"I was not in a trance," said Anna.

"That is a sign of progress," he assured her. "We may soon be able to dispense with the trance altogether. To be frank I have noticed lately that the trances have been much lighter and less productive than formerly."

Quick fear leaped into Anna's eyes. She, too, had been uneasily conscious of failing forces. If the power were to leave her altogether it would take her living with it. Once again she and little Anna would be left to face the world. She said nothing but from that moment there entered into Anna Plumber's "mediumship" an element which had not been there before. Anna began to "fake."

To the eyes of the Rev. Jasper she seemed to improve in facility. The automatic writing came more often and became more readable. But somehow the sitters did not get "results." The communications, though easier to obtain, were more stereotyped and useless. Only once in a while a gleam broke through.

The Rev. Jasper's interest waned. It was time for a new fad anyway and he was not a constant person. Sincere enough in his way he was one of those who pursue strange gods. Psychical research had been a strange god, but now familiarity had bred if not contempt at least disillusion. He became bored.

Anna saw it. She made desperate attempts to hold his interest, but without success. The day came when the circle decided to sit no more and Anna's services were definitely dispensed with. It was done kindly, for the Rev. Jasper was generous according to his lights. He gave her money, which he assured her she had earned, and he gave her letters setting forth his unshaken faith in her occult powers.

After this Anna had drifted. She tried washing again but could not stand it and the minister's letter provided an easier way. She left Canada for the States and moved from one city to another, sometimes received as a prophetess and sometimes fined as a fortune-teller. It was a life which did not encourage spiritual discrimination. Her real power dwindled, her power of faking increased. Yet through it all she held herself aloof from the "profession." She never availed herself of its friendship or its aid. The crowd of sharpers, card-readers, palmists, clairvoyants and tricksters of all kinds which infest cities were repulsive to her. She was afraid of them. She disliked them. She went her own way, saving money as she could and looking forward to a day when she could retire and live the simple life she liked.

Somehow the day seemed long in coming. Little Anna grew up, a pretty, headstrong girl, extravagant, loud and selfish—her father over again. Her mother often looked at her in puzzled wonder. *Could* this be the baby who had been a bit of heaven? Could this be the tiny child whose untroubled eyes had been as pure and remote as summer stars? Where had it fled, the sweetness, the innocency of babyhood? Had it been her fault? Would the girl have been different if the child had been brought up in a settled home under different circumstances? Had Anna, the mother, kept on washing for a living would Anna, the daughter, have obtained a sweeter soul? Who could answer these questions—certainly not poor troubled Anna Plumber.

An end had come to this also. Anna-the-second married. As might have been expected she did not marry wisely; but the man had some money and for a year or two the couple racketed through life having, according to the young wife "a whale of a time," until nature ordered a temporary stop for purposes of her own. Anna-the-second was furious. Stop she would not, let nature understand that! Nature did understand it and was outraged. Instead of a temporary check she ordered a period. The unwilling mother went out of life as her baby came in.

Anna Plumber, now, since several years, Madam Rameses, took her tiny grandchild in her arms and went back to Canada. She decided to be known as a medium no more. She had saved enough to live upon if she lived carefully. Fortune had surely done her worst and would leave her alone hereafter. She could settle down.

But when the now long professional, Madam Rameses sat down to take stock of her soul, she found a curious state of affairs. She had lived with deceit so long that she had ended by being sure of nothing, not even of herself. She hardly knew now what was honest "sight" and what was not. From looking at the rubbish written by her automatic hand with a kind of wondering dislike she had come to view it with a superstition almost as simple as that of her "seekers." Say what you would, it was a mystery how it happened. Even admitting that at times when it had refused to work she had faked its messages, it was still true that sometimes it did work of itself and messages of all sorts, mostly nonsense, "came through." Madam Rameses was afraid of those unsolicited messages. It was as if some one had set up a bogie to frighten a child and the bogie had suddenly *winked.*

So it happened that when, after her daughter's death, she had settled down in a pleasant house in Toronto with the intention of keeping a few "paying guests," to provide her with interest and occupation and to help with the expense, the hand suddenly "brought through" a message to the effect that her "helpers on the other plane" demanded that she should "keep the light burning"—in plain words that she should continue to act as medium.

The demand was a shock to Madam. It confused her terribly. Had she been mistaken in the belief that she was faking? Were the messages, so many of them products of careful fishing, and close observation, real messages after all? Was there in the small remainder of messages which were not faked and whose origin she did not know, some mysterious avenue of communication with the unknown? Was this the "light" which must not die out? She worried about it for months and, in the end, compromised. She would hold to her decision to retire, that is, she would no longer be a professional. She would no longer give regular sittings for the purpose of making money. But, that the directions in the message be obeyed, she would still sit privately for seekers. It is one thing to be a professional clairvoyant and quite another to be a psychic researcher with mediumistic power. Little Lucie, the grandchild, need not be ashamed of that.

The meeting of Madam Rameses and Rosme had been a fortunate thing for both of them. Rosme had called one morning, in the early days of her struggle for independence, at the office of a ladies' agency whither Madam Rameses had also gone in search of a nurse for the Infant. The girl was tired and just a little apprehensive after her initial failure as a school-teacher, but no one would have dreamed of anything save content and well-being from the face she chose to turn upon the world. No one, that is, save Madam Rameses.

Rosme, as she waited, became conscious of Madam first as a disturbing influence. There was a drawing power in the gaze of the masculine lady opposite which was almost annoying. The girl grew restless, shifted her position and finally raised her own eyes resentfully —to meet a glance so kind that resentment gave place instantly to wonder.

"My dear," said the masculine lady, "shall you mind if I speak to you?"

A few moments before, Rosme would have minded, minded very much, but the delightful voice and the kind, blue eyes disarmed her. She even smiled as the lady came toward her and, still smiling, she made room upon her sofa.

Rosme always said afterwards that she was kidnapped, and Madam did not contradict her. Certain it is that when Madam left the agency, having entirely forgotten the business which brought her there, she took Rosme with her. The girl hardly knew how it happened nor does Madam's explanation of her sudden and strong interest in some one she had never seen before seem very illuminating.

"I saw that we were sympathetic, my dear," she said, "and I knew you were alone—as I was once."

What else she may have seen of possible danger or distress or what loneliness she may have sensed under the girl's smile she never said; but the confidence which was established that day had never been regretted by either of them. Rosme slipped into the quiet house of Madam like a bit of the happy youth Anna had longed for and never had; and, in return, the girl found the one thing independence had not given, the comfort and security of home.

XI

FINDING that silence and strict attention to breakfast did not dispose of Madam's little speculative smile, Rosme began to talk.

"I believe this is the very first time I've ever been late at the office," said she, "the firm will want to install a punch-clock immediately."

"Has anything—anything special—happened at the office lately, Rosme?" asked Madam musingly.

"Why no," in surprise, "nothing, except that we are getting in some first-class contracts. Do you know, I believe that those little Jews are going to make good."

"If they do, they'll have you to thank for it."

Rosme nodded. "Yes, in a way. But although they haven't an ounce of originality between them, they have all the other necessary things. That little Joseph Lot is nothing less than a business marvel, and old Mr. Lot is almost as clever. I shan't be surprised if in a year 'Lots' Best Advertising Agency' is known all over the country. They are talking of a branch in Vancouver already. Their motto seems to be 'Don't wait until you grow, grow now!'—and by the same token, that's rather a good catchword! It will do beautifully for an order we have in hand at present."

With businesslike celerity Rosme produced a pencil and made a note in the little leather book which, as the tight skirts then in vogue permitted no pocket, she wore attached, chatelain fashion, to her waistband. "I'm not sure," she added pensively, "that this sort of thing is good for the soul. A man in our business told me the other day that he couldn't look at a sunset now without thinking how best to advertise it, or of how to utilise it in advertising something else! When he saw an especially gorgeous one, he said, all he could think of was how effective it would look on a great placard, surmounted with 'The Last Day' in big, black letters and underneath, in smaller type, 'Of Gilmor's White Wear Bargain Sale.' He added that if he ever got that far he would commit suicide. He promised to let me know in case I could use it—a properly exploited suicide ought to be something really new in advertising!"

They both laughed a little and Rosme rose, brushing a crumb from her neat business skirt. "Well, at least," she said, "it's work that keeps the brain alive. And if I've helped them I'm sure they're welcome. I don't forget that they helped me too."

"Yes," Madam's tone became eagerly reminiscent, "but don't you remember how doubtful it all seemed at first? And you didn't know whether to risk it or not and then a message came through that was so very reassuring. Do you remember exactly what it was, my dear?"

"No-o," absently.

"We ought really to have kept it. It was quite remarkable. Something about your being able to find your best self-expression along literary lines——"

Rosme laughed suddenly, a joyful little crow of a laugh which made her seem very young and foolish. "That's it!" she cried "literary lines! That's what I told David—I mean, that's such a charming way of putting it. Gracious! I must fly."

And fly she did, leaving Madam with the new name "David" to provide food for a great deal of anxious thought.

The office of Lots' Best Advertising Agency was situated on a side street running into Yonge fairly well above the more down-town city blocks. Referred to on the letter-heads and in all business correspondence as "Our Offices?" it did not in reality fulfill the expectation of opulence and glittering space which the words suggested. It consisted of one small and somewhat gloomy room with a frosted window. The furniture, including a counter, a desk, a table, some chairs, some pigeon-holes and a typewriter, had all been good bargains, at second-hand. Besides these glories, the office contained, after 9 A. M., Mr. S. Lot, Mr. Joseph Lot and Miss Rosme Selwyn.

The Brothers Lot never admitted that they were Jews. On the other hand they never denied it, nature having taken care that no one would have believed them if they had. They always said simply that they were "of Russia," which was rather odd considering that their own nation had never done them any harm while Russia had never done them anything else. They had come to this country when they were children and spoke excellent English, differentiated only by the use of an odd word now and then and the slurring of certain syllables which lent the effect of a slight accent. They were shrewd men and just, according to their lights. But their lights were not brilliant ones. They knew, for instance, that Miss Selwyn had been from the first the inspiring soul of their advertising agency, but they paid her just five dollars a month more than the original wage which they had offered her when she came. Also, although they had now turned the corner and were making "good money" they systematically concealed part of their prosperity from her, no definite reason for this being stated even to themselves. Still, once when Rosme had been ill with tonsilitis the firm had sent a specialist, a nurse and (on behalf of Joseph) some flowers. They felt, as Mr. S. Lot said benevolently, that "The welfare of a firm's employees is the business of the firm." It sounded well, and had, in this case, the merit of truth since without this particular employee the firm's "business" would have been in a bad way.

This morning Miss Selwyn was late. Not only had she been late in leaving the house but she had loitered on the way, pausing to gaze in shop windows, sniffing appreciatively, though vainly, before the closed doors of florists where glassed-in summer smiled through panes half blurred with frost.

As she entered the office door Mr. S. Lot glanced up, as if by chance, at the clock while Mr. Joseph Lot found it necessary to consult his watch at the same moment.

"All the office staff late," exclaimed Rosme demurely. "We really ought to have a punch-clock and then we could dock their wages."

Both the Mr. Lots smiled. They would have found it hard to do anything else. Rosme coming in from a long walk on a frosty morning was a cheering sight. For the thousandth time Mr. Joseph wondered what it was which made this girl so charming. He had seen more beautiful girls, his own idea of beauty was somewhat large and wide, regular and placid. Rosme was slender and "bendy" and placidity was far from her. Her small face with its pointed chin and long, narrow eyes, so exquisitely outlined and shaded, fairly danced and sparkled with life. Pale and fine as she was, she was as vivid as the reddest rose—was it perhaps her hair? No it could hardly be her hair, for, following a passing fashion, its bronze glory was almost hidden under a small, close hat. Mr. Joseph decided for the thousandth time that it was not her hair, and let it go at that.

"We have a busy day before us, Miss Selwyn," said Mr. Samuel after he, too, had wondered for a moment why the atmosphere of the office had brightened with her entrance. "A new soap, no less! with everything that any one could possibly say about soap said already a thousand times, and, says our friend, something original, Mr. Lot—original and striking."

"I have thought all night," declared Mr. Joseph dejectedly, "and I can think of nothing either original or striking!"

"How long have we?" asked Rosme, taking off her hat.

"The first copy must be ready by Monday of next week."

"Then we don't need to bother with it to-day. By to-morrow there may be an idea. You can't rush an idea, you know. They like to pop up when no one is looking."

The brothers exchanged a glance and a gesture. The glance meant, "she talks a lot of nonsense but she will get us something." The gesture meant "leave it to her."

"I had an idea as I came along this morning," said Rosme, taking the cover off her typewriter. "It is an idea for that wall-paper firm who want to specialise in decorative flower effects. Some of their samples are quite lovely. The flowers are gone from the gardens now. Why not adopt the catchword, "Keep your garden with you." Our artist could evolve some delightful interior sketches. What do you think?

Again the gesture and the glance, expressive this time of intense mutual satisfaction.

"U-um," said Mr. Samuel reflectively, "not so bad. What do you think, Joseph?"

"It might do," Mr. Joseph looked down the centre of his nose (a feat at which he was very proficient), "unless I think of something better in the meantime."

Rosme laughed. Then suddenly she felt a little annoyed. She felt a desire to do something to that smug look of Mr. Joseph.

"I had another idea," she said pleasantly.

Two ideas in one morning! The brothers smiled at each other.

"Yes?" encouraged Mr. Samuel.

"The other idea was, that I should have to ask for an increase of salary."

There was a moment's dismayed silence. Then, "Why?" asked Mr. Joseph weakly.

"Because," smiled Rosme, "you will never give it to me without asking."

"My brother means," explained Mr. Samuel, "why should your salary be increased? Only two months ago it was already increased by five dollars a month."

"As you say," dreamily, "that was two months ago."

But Mr. Samuel was getting his second wind. "We like," he continued, "to treat our employees——"

"Employee" murmured Rosme.

"—we like to treat everybody with fairness. You will remember that you were quite untried in this business——"

"Correspondence course diploma," hinted Rosme.

"—when we took you on. We taught you all we knew. We allowed you to study every part of the business. We, we——"

"Of course you did," said Rosme consolingly, "don't worry about that. You let me do the whole thing."

"Except the business," put in Mr. Joseph, who clung to his birthright.

"I admit," said Rosme, "that I have no business head whatever."

Mr. Joseph beamed.

"Well then, I cannot see," Mr. Samuel's tone was bland, "why we have to raise your salary."

Rosme banged the typewriter meditatively.

"You don't have to," she said. There was a delicate emphasis on the "have."

Again the brothers telegraphed each other by their favourite method of look and gesture.

This time the look meant, "She's had another offer!" and the gesture said "Give her what she wants—quick."

"We will consider the matter," said Mr. Samuel. "Although I admit," pathetically, "that I did not expect——" a look from Mr. Joseph cut him short. Mr. Joseph did not believe in mixing sentiment with business, except in cases where it might do some good.

Rosme smiled at them both and settled down cheerfully to her desk. She hadn't intended to ask for a raise that morning but, seeing that she had asked for it, and got it, she was greatly pleased. The brothers Lot must be doing even better than she had guessed. With her increased salary she could buy—immediately her mind was busy buying all kinds of things, delectable and delicious. The kind of things millionaires can never buy because they have too much money.

The brothers Lot took up their hats gloomingly and went out to keep an appointment.

Rosme's typewriter clicked gaily on. She did not look up when presently the door opened again, until the strong scent of a certain cigar which she knew and disliked told her that a client had entered.

"Sorry," she said, swinging around on her stool. "Oh, Herr Stumpf, good-morning. I thought it was Mr. Lot who came in."

Herr Stumpf who was low and fat and mostly hidden by the high counter, bowed with what grace was possible.

"I would not interrupt you, Miss Selwyn. My frients, the brothers Lot, they are not at home, is it?"

"It is," said Rosme, "but if you will come in, Herr Stumpf, perhaps I might do in the meantime."

Herr Stumpf came in with alacrity. As he rounded the counter one saw that in appearance he was laughably like the pouchy, pipe-smoking German of the kindly humourist's cartoon. Besides being short and fat he had red, bulgy cheeks, a stiff moustache and little eyes deeply set. One's first impulse was invariably to smile but Rosme had seen Herr Stumpf many times and no longer found him conducive to merriment. She disliked Herr Stumpf very much. Still, he was a good client, and as such, entitled to his little eccentricities.

"It iss about that soap adverdisement I am come," he announced. "What you say, a friendly hint. I wish to tell mine frients there iss behind that soap much money. If they do well with their publicity they will boost themselves—so!" He cast up his eyes and made an upward gesture with his short and pudgy arms at the same time lifting himself on his toes in a highly absurd and theatrical manner. But Rosme had ceased to find anything absurd in Herr Stumpf.

She nodded gravely. "I will tell them," she said.

Herr Stumpf smiled his very large smile, "and as there iss much money," he added, "there will be much commission—iss id not?"

"I am not employed on a commission basis."

"Ach, iss id so! They are clever, mine frients. But there are others who are not so clever, or more clever who shall say? There are some frients of mine own country who would abreciate such good work as you do, Miss Selwyn. If a letter at any time——"

"Thanks," said Rosme politely, "but I am not thinking of making a change at present."

Herr Stumpf shrugged.

"No? Then sometime berhaps. It is no trouble. Ach, we Shermans are not abreciated in this country. We are generous. We like to help. The young we would assist, especially the young. Only this morning I have done something. An idea I have bought from a youth of your country. Could he sell id to your business peoples here? No, but he could sell id to me. I will put id on the market. I will advertise id. It will fill what you call 'a long felt want?' I have helped that youth much."

"Will you pay him a commission—a royalty?" asked Rosme.

Herr Stumpf's small eyes narrowed.

"I have bought the idea oudright," he said shortly and forgetting to smile. "Here is a discription and a memo of what I would like mentioned in the adverdisement. A quickness would oblige me much."

"We will do the best we can." Rosme took the typed sheets and scanned them. "This looks like a good thing. Is it the same young man who sold you the idea for that new filing cabinet?"

"What if so?" asked Herr Stumpf.

"I think I should like to meet that young man," thoughtfully. Then, catching a sudden look of suspicion on the German's face, she added, "he seems to be a clever fellow."

Herr Stumpf smiled his oily smile. "Ach! You do not meet many clever young men, iss id not?" he inquired with great benevolence. "I have many in my acquaindance. I will much pleasure have in introducing you."

"Thanks, please don't bother. It was a passing interest only."

Herr Stumpf winked, a small and deep-set wink, and rose to depart. Rosme, furious with herself for inviting his impertinence, turned to her typewriter.

"All the same," she thought viciously, "I'd warn that lad if I could. That fat German horror is simply buying his brains——" Her quick fingers paused in their rapid typing and a little smile curved her lips.

"Buying brains!" she said out loud. "What a fine catchword. It's just what we want for that new Self-Improvement League. Even Herr Stumpf is not without his uses!"

XII

ALL this time we have been neglecting Miss Clara Sims in a manner which she would be the first to resent.

"If you think me of no importance," I can fancy her saying, "just try to get along with this history without me and see what happens."

She would be right; we could not tell David's story without telling her story too, at least in part. We would like to tell it truthfully although it isn't always easy to deal justly with people whose tricks and manners one may not admire. It is only fair, for instance, to admit that Miss Sims was extremely clever in the way she managed the affair with David. David, on the contrary, was not clever. He was clever enough ordinarily and could usually see as far as most people. But in this instance he proved no match for Clara. Perhaps she succeeded in finding his "blind spot"—a spot which eminent psychologists tell us is not hard to find in most of us.

She made mistakes, of course. The meeting at the station was a mistake. She realised that at once and her tactics changed as quickly and as easily as a summer wind. David had no sooner turned a set face toward the breeze than he found it blowing gently from an entirely different direction. From being effusive and possessive, Miss Sims, in a moment, had become pensive and shy.

As they walked out of the station she lifted to him a startled, half-ashamed face.

"Oh I—I'm afraid I shouldn't have come," she murmured, "I'm sorry if I——"

As usual the sentence remained unfinished and as usual David's quick chivalry hastened to cover her confusion. He simply couldn't allow a woman to feel ashamed.

"It was very kind of you to think of meeting me," he said with a fair show of heartiness. "I hope it hasn't put you out at all."

"Oh, that!" murmured Miss Sims—the implication was that nothing which she might do for David could ever be considered to put her out—"when you have been so very, very kind to me."

This she saw was nearer the right note. David felt ashamed of his irritation at the station.

"Well," he said cheerfully, dismissing the subject, "how has the city managed to exist without me? How are all the select boarders?"

"The select ones are all selectly well."

"And you?"

"Oh I," with a small, quickly suppressed sigh, "you know I am always well."

This made David look at her more closely. She looked, he thought, not quite so bright as usual. Working too hard, probably.

"When do you get any holidays?" he asked.

"Holidays?" with a pathetic widening of the eyes, "not for ages. Our very busiest season comes first, around Christmas, longer hours, you know."

"That's too bad."

"No. It is necessary, I suppose. These big stores can hardly be expected to take account of the individual."

"But that is exactly what they ought to do." David, in common with many young men, felt that there was nothing in business ethics which he did not feel competent to advise about. "What right have employers to employ individuals if they do not take account of them? What is our civilisation for if it does not make us aware in a practical way of the truth that the good of the community is in exact proportion to the good of the individual? Now these big stores——" Being fairly started on the subject David was safe to work himself up into a state of indignant interest which would relieve Miss Sims from further conversational effort. It was quite safe to relax and think about something else; being careful, of course, to maintain the attitude of intelligent listener. When they parted at the corner above Drummond's David had almost ceased to blame her for the episode at the station. She offered her hand in farewell, shyly, and with a little wistful smile.

"Some day perhaps more men will think as you do," she said, "and then——"

The eloquent pause conveyed the conviction that when more men felt like David the millenium would be right along.

Being but as other men, David found this not unpleasant. He departed whistling.

This little change of front on Clara's part had been something in the nature of a shock-absorber. David, though more fully alive to the dangers of his engaged state was still unwilling to take the extreme measure advocated by the ruthless Mr. Willard. The girl, he felt, was incapable of the trickery they suspected. They would find that, as soon as it was advisable, she would be quite as eager as he to end the awkward situation. A situation which, when all was said, must be worse for her than for him.

One thing, however, troubled him. What would Miss Selwyn think? Hang the thing anyway—what could she think?

She had gone away without giving him her address, without asking him to call. All those things he, and perhaps she, had intended to say at the last moment had not been said. Why had he waited so long? Considering the fact that he and Miss Selwyn had practically been brought up together (well, in the same town anyway!) he should have felt no diffidence in asking where she lived and begging permission to call. In fancy he saw himself doing it, in a kind of offhand, every-day way, as one might ask a fellow-man for a match, or something. Why hadn't he done it? Fool, fool that he was!

The heartiness with which he called himself fool, gave David pause. It wouldn't do, he felt, to make too much of a small matter. Disregarding the fiction of their having been friends since childhood, he really knew very little about Miss Selwyn. There were numbers of girls whom he knew better. Billy Fish had not entirely neglected his social education. Why not go and call on some of these girls, one of them, any of them? Somehow he did not want to call on—just girls. Why then was he fussing so about Miss Selwyn's address? Some too-understanding self began to laugh. "Ha, ha!" chuckled this self, "why indeed?"

"Oh, shut up!" said David disgustedly. He refused to continue the argument.

Meanwhile the select boarders were thoroughly enjoying the engagement. It was the first time such a thing had happened in the memory of the oldest sojourner. So romantic, too!

There was a rumour to the effect that one night Mrs. Carr, descending late for the purpose of locking up, had come upon an affecting scene—Mr. Grieg on his knees before Miss Sims who had just refused him for the fourth time. The poor young man was almost, if not quite, in tears, and Mrs. Carr had spoken seriously to

Miss Sims, reminding her (according to Miss Walker, the Pancake) that a good man's love may not be lightly scorned, or (according to Mr. Martin) that she might turn him down once too often. Whereupon Miss Sims had melted and everything had hurried on to the happiest of endings.

There were other versions, but this was the favourite.

The modesty and restraint of the engaged couple was commented on favourably. There was, as Miss Walker said, no vulgar display of one's deepest emotions. As far as Mr. Greig was concerned one might almost think that he was not engaged at all. His manner was so courteous, so friendly, yet always reserved. Never in any way did he embarrass the lady of his choice by too much attention.

As for Miss Sims, the general verdict was that she had improved wonderfully. One of the more spiteful boarders (feminine) went so far as to wonder how she "did it."

"Getting engaged agrees with our Clara, I fancy," said the facetious Mr. Martin, "kind of turned down the lights all around. Sort of subdued effect, eh what?" (Mr. Martin said "eh what" because he wished passionately to be considered English. This was also why he used "fancy" instead of "guess" which was more natural.)

"She is certainly quieter," agreed Miss Walker. "Do you know when they are to be married?"

No one knew anything about this. Miss Sims, approached with great tact by several lady boarders, had nothing more definite to offer than an unfinished sentence to the effect that "Mr. Greig's bereavement being so very recent——" The enquirers nodded their heads hastily and said, "Yes, certainly, one could understand that."

They were allowed though, in deepest secrecy, to see certain articles which reposed in Miss Sims' bottom drawer; articles which would have given David the shock of his life if he could have known that they existed. They were, Miss Sims confided, "just a little beginning."

The comments upon them were various.

"Quite beautiful!"

"Much too fine for a girl in her position."

"Simply foolish."

"You'd think she was going to marry a millionaire."

"Oh, well, one only gets married once—usually!"

The gist of these opinions was put in words for Clara by Bunny Weeks one night after an especially extravagant purchase.

"Going it rather strong, aren't you?" she asked casually.

"Why?"

"Well, I think I'd be a little surer of my investment before I got in too deep."

"Oh, I'm sure enough."

"But you know he doesn't mean to go on—You've led him along beautifully but he's gone his limit, if I know anything at all about men."

"You don't," said Clara succintly.

Miss Weeks gave her blonde head the toss which goes with the inevitable "Oh, don't I?" "Well," she said sharply, "I know this much, David Greig has no intention of marrying you and never had."

"*Has not*, present tense, *never had*, past tense, *will have*, future tense," murmured Miss Sims.

Bunny, who was sewing on a glove button, missed the hole and pricked her finger. Her interest and curiosity, which of late had been flagging, became aware of a new stimulus. Her round eyes grew rounder.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, sucking her finger.

Miss Sims favoured her with a languid glance of unreadable meaning; then, like a certain statesman, "wait and see!" she said.

Nevertheless Clara was not in her own mind quite as confident as she pretended. David had proved surprisingly difficult.

Even the dancing had not done all that might have been expected. For one thing, David did not need much teaching. He could dance and dance well. Clara, who naturally did not know of David's mother who had been "like a thistle-top in the wind," had not allowed for this. Neither had she allowed for an instinctive kindness which led him to dance with every one, even Pancake, whose dancing was really "the limit." Still, there had been times—Clara smiled and frowned when she thought of them; smiled because she had been near triumph; frowned because she did not know why triumph had not come. It seemed at times as if Bunny were right and that David had really gone as far as he would go. Also he had, just lately, showed unmistakable signs of going back. Only yesterday in the nicest of ways he had intimated that it was now up to her to make the next move. He had stood by her. Her position in their small world was unassailable. Now it was for her to gracefully withdraw and end their mutual embarrassment. If she hesitated or shilly-shallied now she knew that the friendly confidence of his eyes would turn to dislike and distrust. The crisis in her affair was rapidly approaching. Well, she must make good, or give up. Her red lips closed tightly and her dark eyes hardened.

"I think you're sort of silly, anyway," declared Miss Weeks, frankly. "If you cared for him I'd understand it. But you know you don't. He isn't your style.

You're never natural when you're with him. Good heavens! It must be awful to be always trying to be somebody else. Like hanging on to something with the tips of your fingers and your feet off the floor. Not for mine, thanks. I like a man who ain't shocked when I make a slip in grammar and who doesn't expect me to read the newspapers. So do you—if you'd be honest."

Clara took this in good part.

"I seldom make mistakes now," she said, "and I get along beautifully by just glancing at the headlines. When he asks me my opinion about something I'm not wise to I just look thoughtful and say, 'That's a difficult question.' It shows deep thought, you see, not to be too ready with your criticisms." She laughed a little.

"Queer how easy clever men are to fool," was Bunny's comment, "all the same I don't want any of it in mine—too tiring. As I say, if you liked him it would be different. But you know you like that stylish friend of his a whole lot better—though I don't admire your taste."

"I do not!" she had struck fire this time. Clara's dark eyes snapped; a difficult and unbecoming redness spread over her face.

"Look, she blushes!" cried Bunny, delighted. "Any one could see with half an eye that he was what you're looking for. And he's quite attentive too. Hardly nice of him, the way he tries to make the running with his friend's best girl."

"You are horridly vulgar, Bunny."

"Being born that way, I find it restful. But seriously, Henny, why don't you make a change?"

Clara had deliberately turned her face aside but the curious Bunny, watching, could still follow its expression in the mirror. She saw that it was perplexed and frowning. Its placidly confident surface was evidently troubled. Did she really care for the Willard fellow then? Bunny, who had set out merely to tease, began to reflect. It was true enough that Willard had suddenly taken a great interest in Miss Sims. In his light and sketchy way he had certainly devoted himself to her whenever they had met and they had met rather often lately. If Bunny had no great cleverness, she had instinct, and she knew intuitively that here was a nature which would attract Clara in a way forever impossible to David.

"Say," she added with real kindliness, "if you like him why don't you let the other fellow go?"

For quite five minutes Clara did not answer. Her face in the mirror continued to frown. Then she threw up her head with the gesture of one who finds it a relief to speak of something hidden.

"I'll tell you," she said. There was a hint of fierceness in her voice. "Murray Willard would play with me if he could. He'll never think of any woman seriously until—until he's good and ready. Well, I'm not so simple as to wait for him, even if—even if he asked me to."

"Asked you to? He can't ask you when you're engaged to Mr. Greig."

Clara smiled her slow smile.

"Your extensive study of men has evidently stopped short of Murray Willard, my dear."

"Well, could he?"

"He hasn't tried. And anyway I'd be a fool to think of him. He's brilliant but he's not sound. And he gambles. The woman who trusts him will wish she hadn't."

"All the same, you like him."

Clara met the questioning eyes in the mirror and held them for a moment with a sombre glance. Then "No, I do not," she said, resolutely.

Bunny shrugged. "You're a wonder at fooling other people, Henny," she said, "look out that you don't fool yourself."

XIII

As may be gathered from the foregoing, Mr. Murray Willard was taking an active interest in his friend's entanglement. No one was more surprised at this than David. He had expected that, following his final turning down of so much good advice, Murray would ignore the whole affair. The opposite had happened, Murray had continued to manifest an interest, which in view of his general selfishness, seemed unaccountable. He was very nice to Clara. He induced David to think of little pleasures for her, pleasures which in the most natural manner included himself. David was puzzled by the rapidity with which the new friendship ripened. He often observed with pleasure how well the two got on together. But the things which he did not observe were the things which mattered. These things were inconsiderable, just looks, smiles, handclasps, a shade of too deep interest on the one hand, a shadow of self-consciousness on the other—trifles all, but trifles potent with that invisible force of human attraction which goes by many names.

Clara knew that she was flirting with David's friend. This was nothing new. She was used to flirtation, but she was used also to having the advantage altogether on her side. To find it otherwise was both novel and annoying, and the annoyance added just that spice of excitement which had hitherto been lacking. Clara felt as a good fencer feels when he meets an antagonist worthy of his steel. Yet it was not only admiration for a fellow-artist which drew her to Willard. In David, for instance, such adroitness might have pleased but never could have thrilled her; in Willard it thrilled even when it did not please. The difference was ominous.

As for Willard himself, his attitude in the matter was very simple. In devoting himself to Miss Sims, he had but one motive, the disentangling of David from her neatly thrown coil. For Clara herself he cared nothing. She presented nothing new in his experience and he soon tired of her good looks. She bored him. Sometimes he let her see it; but Clara, never yet defeated, would heed no warning. She still backed herself to win. So the little sordid game went on and, in spite of its smallness and its meanness, slowly the big things of life drew near, observant of the players. For there is no soul too mean for tragedy and no heart too small for love.

Willard and David were better friends now than they had ever been. Willard was, David felt, being awfully decent and Willard would probably have said the same of himself. He liked David all the better for the trouble he was taking in his behalf. Of the service in preparation David had, naturally, no idea. Billy Fish knew, but he had been sworn to secrecy by all the gods. Often in those days David found Billy with his mouth half open as if prepared to hint portentous sayings, but always Billy managed to swallow them, in time.

"Tell you what, old chap!" said David one day, "if I didn't know you so well I'd say you had something on your mind."

"Think I haven't got a mind, don't you?" retorted Billy, gloomingly. "Well I have, and all I can say is that of all the blind bats——"

"Yes?"

But Billy had once more remembered his gods and swallowed hard.

"Say, I don't like that Murray Willard much," he concluded lamely.

"What's he been doing now?"

"Oh—nothing. That is, nothing you'd notice. Do you really like him, Greig?"

"Yes," stoutly, "I do. I owe him a great deal."

"I never like people I owe things to. It can't be done. Besides Willard never has a dollar and wouldn't lend it if he had."

"It wasn't his money I borrowed, it was his uncle."

"That old grouch, John Baird?"

"The same. You ought to know, if any one does, how much the friendship of John Baird has meant to me. The man's a wonder! I've learned more in one of my weeks with him than I'd have learned from the textbooks in a year. If I ever do anything worth while I'll owe it to his teaching. And I might never have met him if it hadn't been for the merest chance."

"I thought you said it was Willard?"

"So it was, but it was chance also. Baird is Murray's uncle. His whole name is John Baird Willard, but he dropped the Willard years ago after a terrible flare-up with his brother who was Murray's father. They hated each other like poison, Murray says. When brothers do hate it's pretty bad."

"Was Murray's father anything like Murray?"

David ignored this fling.

"I don't know the cause of the quarrel, neither does Murray. It might have been anything, or nothing. Baird is full of queer ideas."

"Bats in the belfry?"

"Not a bat! But he's—bitter. There's a strange history behind his bitterness no doubt. But he's got a brain as big as a house and as full of wonders as a museum."

"Kind of a pocket Edison?"

"More than that."

"Queer no one hears of him."

"The queerness is his. He won't allow himself to be heard of. Keeps no record of his experiments and pigeon-holes all his results. He is a man with a spite at the world, or a disdain of it. Perhaps both. There is no such thing as progress, he contends; the race is only Sisyphus rolling a stone up a hill to see it crash down again. And he declines to help push!"

"Why does he help you, then?"

"Because he is inconsistent as we all are, fortunately. Murray took me up to his house one day when he wanted to get some money. We walked right in on an experiment that just lifted me off my feet—it came near to lifting us all off the earth for that matter, for the jarring of the door almost caused a serious explosion. Baird never looked up. He finished his test without glancing at us. Then he made a few remarks!

"Did you ever see the imperturbable Murray flurried? Well, he was more than flurried then. He was frightened. He was quite ready to retire without the spoil he came for. But I just couldn't go without knowing more about that experiment."

David smiled reminiscently.

"Murray went but I stayed. I don't know what I said exactly or how I explained to Baird that I didn't care a hang for him or his remarks but just for the meaning of what he was doing. But I must have put it over somehow for all at once he quieted down and actually explained the process with some minuteness. I didn't go home that day until I had won permission to come back. He lets me work with him now. I take all my ideas to him and some day——"

"Someday he'll steal 'em!" said Billy, sadly.

David laughed. "He'd be welcome. It is I who may end in stealing. He makes me free of everything and the only quarrel we've had so far was over my refusing to make money out of a discovery of his."

"Oh, mumma! Is he taken that way often? I'll bet he never made that offer to his amiable nephew."

"To Murray?" David looked slightly troubled. "It was nothing which would have been of use to any one but me. It wasn't finished. But he does help Willard, with money, often. He isn't at all a poor man although he refuses to add to his wealth by marketing his brains."

"I wonder the young heir doesn't try to speed him up."

"You wouldn't wonder if you knew John Baird," dryly. "He's absolutely set on that idea. His secrets are his own and he declares that the only thing which would ever induce him to make use of them would be the outbreak of a great war."

"Blow us all up, would he? Pleasant old party!"

"It's part of his pose of hating the world. Of course he doesn't mean it."

"Commendable restraint on his part! But if he's going to wait for a war to loosen up, Murray's prospects are slim. 'Cause why? 'Cause there ain't going to be no war."

"He thinks there is," said David, after a smoke-filled pause.

"What is?"

"Going to be a war."

"Billy tapped his forehead significantly and sighed.

"I tell you he isn't!" declared David crossly. "He's as sane as I am and far saner than you. It's just a theory of his, but you ought to hear him argue it out. His logic is perfect. And when he has proved it all down to the last point, he has a few things to say about people who don't agree with him. We are all babies, he says, playing with dynamite. It would be frightful to watch if one cared for the babies! which, of course, he doesn't."

"But, my child, who's going to fight? Not me. It isn't done in the best circles."

"Baird doesn't pretend to say who or what will start it. But he says we'll all be in it for we're so twisted up now that not one of the bigger nations could keep out. No matter how small the beginning it would be like a maelstrom drawing us all down."

"Rot!"

"No. That part isn't rot. Given the incredible premise that any nation would be mad enough to start something serious, he may be right."

"But no nation is wearing war this century."

"No, thank heaven! That's where Baird goes off the rails. He says civilisation is only a crust and any one with ears can hear it cracking."

Billy managed a cheerful shiver but David was not to be diverted.

"It does sound crazy, that part," he admitted. "I suppose it's because he refuses to mix with his kind. Take you and me, for instance, we're ordinary specimens of our generation. Can you hear the crust cracking? Can you fancy yourself wanting to stick a man with a bayonet?"

"N-o," said Billy. "He might want to stick back."

"Well, in the old days, they seem to have liked it, unless history lies. They went about looking for war. Now we laugh at any one who seriously suggests it."

"Yes, let's!" said Billy, amiably.

"There is no question," went on David heatedly, "which can arise between governments of sane men which cannot be settled satisfactorily by arbitration. What then could cause war, short of a deliberate and criminal purpose such as one would hesitate to ascribe to the devil himself."

"Nothing, old scout, nothing!" agreed Billy, soothingly. "It's quite all right. Keep your hair on! And if not arbitration, consider the big guns—biff, bang! and we'd all be blown off the map, leaving a world for little squirrels to play in."

"Not quite so simple as that. But still, the fact that we go on perfecting these wonders of destruction is in itself a sign and seal that we'll never be wicked enough to use them."

"Is it?" Billy sat up suddenly, "do you know for a second I had a shiver! We're piling up fireworks all around—just suppose that some one, with a screw loose, should take a fancy to see them go off?"

Through the floating haze of cigarette smoke the two young men looked into each others startled eyes. Then they both blew a smoke ring, looked foolish and smiled. They had set up a figure of fear only to laugh it down.

XIV

IT was later on in the same evening that David first learned of Billy's acquaintance with Miss Rosme Selwyn.

"Rather piggy of you not to let on that you knew her too," suggested Billy. "What was the idea?"

"I didn't know her. That is, I didn't know that I knew her until that morning on the train."

"How," said Billy, "did you not know that you knew that you knew her? Be careful of your answer. For, to me, it looked as if you knew her mighty well."

"Well, you see, I knew her long ago."

"As bad as that? Previous existence, cosmic bond, soulmates through the ages? Let us take it as read. But why the delay? Why didn't you want to re-meet her when I gave you the chance?"

"You? You gave me the chance! What do you mean?"

"That's right, pretend I never did! As if I hadn't asked you to take her to a show a hundred times—well, once anyway. That time I wanted you to come along with Mary Fox and me? I told you her friend was a wonder."

"You say that of every girl. How was I to know you were telling the truth?"

"After that," said Billy, rising with dignity, "nothing remains but—aha! catching sight of the brilliancy of David's face, "sets the wind in that quarter? young man, I pity and forgive."

"Drop it, Billy! Miss Selwyn comes from my town and I knew her when we were children. She seems more to me than just a casual acquaintance. I'd give a good deal to know her better. But I don't even know where she lives."

"I do."

"But—she didn't ask me to call."

"It was up to you to ask if you might. Did you?"

"Not exactly. But I think she understood——"

Billy shook his head. "No, you have to be plainer with them than that! They make a point of not understanding. You had better go back and start all over."

"Do you know her well, Billy?"

"No. But the omission is hers. I've met her several times when I've been with Mary. But I never seem to have impressed her mind. Doesn't take me seriously, you know. It's no use running after a girl who gurgles when she looks at you."

"Gurgles?"

"Didn't you ever hear her laugh? She's got the loveliest little gurgle I ever heard. All the chaps who know her rave about it."

"What?" sharply.

"Do you think you are the only boy who was born in her town?" asked Billy, solicitously. "Believe me, not. There are others."

"Is she——" began David. "I prefer not to discuss Miss Selwyn," he finished coldly.

Billy hugged himself with delight; never before had he been able to string old David like this.

"Do you mean is she popular?" he asked innocently. "Rather! Never saw a girl more so. My dear son, you will be right in the fashion, and about the hundred and steenth on the list!"

He expected a pillow cushion at least for this, but David threw him nothing more serious than a troubled glance. His cigarette had gone out.

"Yes, I supposed she would be popular," he said half to himself.

Billy repented.

"Oh, if it's truth you're wanting," he said disgustedly, "she doesn't go around with any one at all. Too busy! Does tall advertising stunts somewhere. Of course she is admired. That chap MacIlvain, who paints, raves about her hair. He too, was brought up with her from infancy."

"MacIlvain? I used to go swimming with him. He didn't know her any more—I mean he didn't know her as well as I did! Is he going to paint her?"

"Wanted to. But she said she hadn't time. She's not like Mary and her set who can play around. Life is real, life is earnest and the grave, etc., etc."

"She's not a bit like that!" indignantly.

Billy yawned.

"What would happen, Billy, if I called without being asked?"

"A frost, little one. I speak as a prophet."

"What worries me is—what do you suppose she thought of what happened at the station?"

"Um—um!" said Billy, delicately.

"You mean it was obvious?"

"At least distinctly visible in fine weather."

"You think she didn't like it?"

"Why should she?" reasonably.

"I couldn't explain?"

"Not 'alf! That is why I predict cold weather."

David sighed. "Then the only thing seems to be to wait a little until there is no need for explanation."

"Oh, it's well to be off with the o-old love,
Before you are on with the new,"

whistled Mr. Fish, cheerfully. And this time a pillow, well and truly thrown, was the reward of his endeavour.

"All the same," added Billy, rising to go, "if I were you, *I'd hurry up!*"

"I will."

David's tone was confident and so was his state of mind. Things were coming along very nicely. The delicate hint which he had ventured to convey to Miss Sims had been met in the promptest manner. She had told him that she had been thinking things out and asked him to make an appointment for a little quiet talk in a day or two. It was his intention to arrange for this quiet talk at once. To-morrow would not be too soon. Billy's conversation had aroused a sense of unrest. He would meet Clara to-morrow as she left Drummond's; they would have a quiet dinner down-town and settle the affair out of hand.

This programme, David carried out to the letter. So that next evening Clara, furtively searching the hurrying crowds for a sight of David's friend, was considerably annoyed by the sight of David himself. Her greeting was cold. Even policy gave way before disappointment. Besides, it was still possible that Willard might be waiting for her around the corner—he sometimes did. If he saw her with David she would lose her walk home with him; and she had come to prize those walks. You may begin to pity her if you like.

They had turned the corner now—was that Murray? No, he hadn't come! and this was the fifth night that he hadn't come! Very well, then, let him stay away. It was nothing to her what he did—nothing, nothing!

Pale with anger and something which she would not admit to be pain, the girl decided once more, as she had decided often before, to be definitely done with Willard and to devote her whole attention to the problem of David, a problem which bade fair to tax her utmost powers.

Already, David, deprived of her customary smile of welcome, was looking slightly aggrieved. Of course he did not want Miss Sims to smile on him. But what had she stopped doing it for?

"Perhaps you would rather I had not met you at the store?" he asked diffidently.

The smile came back. It was lovely of David to have met her! Just like his usual kindness, and it would be such a pleasant change to have dinner down town. Had he told Mrs. Carr not to expect them?

Yes, David had told Mrs. Carr.

"You see," he said, "we never seem to get a moment to ourselves. And this arrangement will give us time for our little talk. You wished that, didn't you?"

It was David's way to face his questions squarely and to lose no time in doing it. But his way was not Clara's.

"Don't try to find reasons," she said pettishly. "Reasons spoil things so."

David's lips set a trifle grimly and Clara, watching under the brim of her hat, saw that the time for pretty puttings-off had gone by.

Instantly he felt her soft touch on his arm. He was used to this by now and could not have sworn that he did not find it pleasant.

"What is it?" he asked kindly, looking down at her.

Clara smoothed the last of her frown from her face and laughed.

"You haven't a speck of manners, David," she said, "it would be much more polite to pretend you did not want to hurry up our talk about things." Her tone was light but there was just a hint of pathos somewhere.

As if the girl were trying to be cheerful at the expense of her real feelings.

"We'll wait till we have something to eat, anyway," said David, drawing the hand a little closer within the fold of his arm. It was a cold night and the hand was small.

Dinner was pleasant. The warm room, the lights, the flowers, the music, the passing of gay and well dressed people, the sense of privacy amid the crowd, all were stimulating and delightful to their unjaded youth. David, who had no natural taste for crowds found that, for a change, he liked it very much. Clara sighed with the content of one who breathes her own atmosphere. She looked across the little table for two and felt the glow which a woman feels when her escort might be the desired of other women. For the hundredth time she tried to analyse what it was in David which gave him his distinguished air. It wasn't his height, nor his fine proportions; it wasn't that his clothes seemed always just right without effort; it wasn't even his arresting face with its beautiful eyes so full of the clear, fine ardour of youth. It was something which included all these, yet transcended them. It was almost as if the faintly luminous shadow of some larger and as yet unrealised self surrounded him, saying to the world, "This man has it in him to be great."

"Sometimes you look so much older than you are," declared Clara, voicing this impression.

"Do I?" David's eyes twinkled. "I hope it's a fault that doesn't grow with years."

"You don't really care, though," she guessed shrewdly. "Men don't have to. But I love youth. I'd like to keep it always!"

"Then you would miss the 'last of life for which the first was planned'."

"I don't care about that," listlessly. "It must be awful, I think, to be old. To look back and see others still young—oh, I'd hate it!" Clara shivered.

"No, you wouldn't. You'd think, 'Is it possible that I was ever as silly as that?' You would pity the young things, not envy them."

Clara knew better, but she did not argue. They were getting away from the purpose of their conversation. After a pause in which she finished, in an absent manner, the last spoonful of her ice, she looked up at him with a sudden darkening of the eyes. "I have been thinking about you and me, David. And first I want to thank you. You have been so good, so very, very kind—no one could have been kinder. I——" the dark eyes fell again upon her plate.

"Please don't!" said David gently.

"No, I won't, I know you hate to be thanked. But what I wanted to tell you is this—I have planned to go home for a little holiday right after Christmas, just as soon as the rush is over. That will arrange everything nicely, don't you see?"

"After Christmas!" There were still four weeks till Christmas! David remembered this with cold dismay. He had hoped for something much earlier than that. But the girl's eyes were on his face, anxious eyes, eyes with an appeal in them—very beautiful eyes too, soft and dark! He swallowed down his dismay with less effort than he would have thought possible. After all, Clara was not asking much, four weeks out of a lifetime.

"I can't get away before," said Clara timidly, answering his unspoken comment. "But right after Christmas there is a slack season. I can go then. I have planned it all. You see, I will take my trunk and everything and then, when I come back, if I do come back, I will simply go to another boarding house. There will never need to be any explanations at all. The people at Mrs. Carr's will just forget about it, or, if they ever think, will conclude that we quarrelled or that——"

"That you got tired of me," finished David smiling.

"Do you think so?"

The girl was looking directly into his eyes as she put the low toned question. But it was not of him that she was thinking. It was not his face that she saw, but, by some trick of fancy, a face which at that moment she discovered to be strangely like his. For a second it seemed that she looked at Willard's face. She closed her eyes and when she opened them the likeness, or illusion or whatever it was, had gone.

But the effect of that moment on David was electrical. For the first time in all his association with Clara Sims he had stumbled up against reality. That look had been no clever simulation. It was vital, real, revealing. In that passing glimpse David had seen love in a woman's eyes!

How was he to guess that it was not there for him?

When a moment afterward Clara faltered something about never having noticed before how much he resembled his friend Murray Willard, he attached no importance to what he considered an effort to re-establish ordinary conversation.

The look had shaken him. What did it mean? Had he in any way really hurt this girl? Had his carelessness in letting this affair drag on been fraught with consequences to her of which he had never dreamed? Or was he nothing but a conceited cad seeing things which did not exist? Almost, he thought it must be the latter for the look had been so fleeting and was so completely gone!

Clara had finished her coffee and was putting on her gloves.

"You'll find it will be quite simple," she said again. Her voice sounded tired. "I shall just go—and that will be all. In the meantime, I suppose we can be good friends. It won't worry you?"

"Rather not!" Dimly David felt impelled to offer something. "We'll have the time of our lives." Whether he had dreamed that look or not, its memory burdened him with a sense of his own inadequacy. A good time was terribly little to offer but, as it was all he had to give, he offered it.

As for—other people, well, everything connected with "other people" would have to be put sternly aside for the present. Christmas was only four weeks distant and life is long.

Their ride home was a silent one. David was busy with his thoughts and Clara for once made no effort. She seemed tired.

XV

IT was Tom Moore, wasn't it, who gave us that excellent recipe for "the best of all ways to lengthen our days"? But how about the best way to shorten them? David had his own recipe for that—work. He was always a good worker and after the interview which delayed his freedom until Christmas he worked even harder. Then one day with a whoop which would have appalled Mrs. Carr's select ears could they have heard it, he was off to John Baird's with a precious something in his pocket.

The house of John Baird, city hermit and despiser of his kind, was his workshop also. It was the despair of his housekeeper, a decent woman by the name of Woods, that, this being so, the front windows downstairs were not allowed to wear curtains.

"Not," sighed Mrs. Woods, "like a house at all."

"It's not a house. It's a workshop."

"But it would look like a house," she protested, "if it had curtains."

A misanthrope could scarcely be expected to see the force of this and the front windows remained bare.

"There's where the ogre lives!" whispered children passing by. They were all frightened of the old man and when he came out to take the air they scattered like rabbits before him. The thing which frightened them was his utter indifference. He seemed never to see them, or hear them, or know that they were there. Perhaps he didn't; children were not children to John Baird, they were "the coming generation." Something which figured in his arguments but not in his life.

For a long time now his nephew, Murray Willard, had been his one definite link with the outside world. He found the young man useful and paid him for being so. For Murray personally he cared not at all. He knew his good points and he knew his failings too, but he never praised the one nor rebuked the other. He knew that the young man drank occasionally. He knew that he gambled steadily and he knew that in these two weaknesses lay the seeds of many others. Yet he remained indifferent. When Murray came to him, as he often did, for money to settle gaming debts, he gave or withheld as the mood prompted him, but both his giving and his withholding were coldly impersonal. Willard was afraid of this indifference, just as the children were.

So far we have not drawn an agreeable character. The excuse is that John Baird was not agreeable. He was not the crusty old chap of fiction, with a warm heart ready to blossom into generosity and kindliness at the touch of a loving hand. A loving hand would have given John Baird a fit, and he was long past the blossoming age. There was, perhaps, a kink in his nature. And there was a history to account for the kink. Most kinks have histories. John's had to do with his brother James. No one knew just what it was. James Willard had been a brilliant man and a man of colossal selfishness. In contrast to John, he was handsome, smiling and debonnaire. This is not a record of James Willard's life. If it were it would be a record of cold and smiling destruction. There is an account of him in "Canadian Men of Note." It gives his standing as a scientist, the names of his two wives, neither of whom survived him, and the date of his death at the early age of forty-five. The loss to scientific research, it says, can hardly be estimated.

John had become practically a recluse several years before his brother's death and had remained so until David had broken into his narrow self-centred life and had refused to go out again. The vitality of the bond of interest between them proved stronger than the youth of the one and the settled misanthropy of the other. It was not David whom John liked, at first, it was David's unquenchable interest, his tireless pertinacity, his already quickened insight into the mysteries which held his own mind captive. David demanded and John gave. He couldn't help it, since the things demanded gained so much in giving. Almost before they knew it the two were friends and John Baird, who so loudly denied the brotherhood of man, had stumbled himself upon a brother. David came to mean to him a last remaining bit of the spice of life. To say that he loved him would perhaps say too much but there was certainly something warm and human in his feeling for his pupil which might have been love in a happier nature.

He was waiting for David to-day. Following a period of hard and steady work, the boy had not been near him for over a week and John's face was grim. He had heard disquieting news. News which called for refutation on David's part, and the sooner the better. The story had come from Murray Willard and may have been told purely to annoy him. David, said Murray, was engaged—engaged to a simpering girl! John fairly raged as he thought of it. It couldn't be true. He didn't believe it—and yet!—if it were true? Then he, John Baird, was through with David! wait a moment—wouldn't that be exactly what would please Murray? Perhaps he had played for that very thing? The inventor, who was an adept at imputing unworthy motives, thought this not unlikely. The story was probably a lie.

Nevertheless his face was grim, as he watched for

David by the window. If he did not come to-day—but he did come! John saw him swing round the corner, his overcoat flying open, his hat tipped back as if it were May instead of December. He was in a hurry, too, for with one bound he was up the steps and into the room before John had time to retire from the window.

"See the conquering hero comes!" shouted David with no preliminaries. "Beat the trumpets, blow the drums! John, I've got it!"

"You had it before," said John pessimistically. "But it didn't work."

"It will work now! Just you wait and see. I tell you I've *got* it! Come and look!"

Very slowly and disguising quite successfully the trembling interest he felt, the old inventor bent over the drawings which David with excited haste spread out upon the table.

It needed only a glance of his trained eye, familiar with every detail, to see the change which the boy had introduced, a change small enough in its way but tremendous in its importance since it transformed what had before been an unrealisable dream into a working reality.

"Oh, hurry *up!*" cried David, fidgeting on one leg, "look—there!—don't you see, man!"

"I could see if you'd take your finger off," said John acidly. "Oh yes, I see, I see," he had a maddening habit of repeating his last words in a sing song manner and he went on saying, "I see, I see," until David could have shaken him.

"Well, what do you see?" he shouted.

With great caution John raised his eyes from the tracings and blinked at David.

"You'll never make an inventor if you lose yourself over a simple thing like that," he pronounced. But the light in his blinking eyes was the light that David had been waiting to see.

"Who cares?" cried he, seizing the papers and waving them aloft. "Enough for the moment is the victory thereof. Ta—ra—ra! Simple, isn't it? And weren't we idiots not to see it before?"

"We were," said John amiably.

"Do you really think it will do, John? I can hardly wait to try."

"I don't think, I know. It's what we've been searching for and, look you David, it's new!"

"Well?" questioningly.

"Don't you see? It's new. You've invented something!"

The two looked at each other and a pure joy, the same in kind if not in degree, glowed in the eyes of each. David, of course, blushed.

"That is to say," went on John grouchily, "if anything ever is invented, which I doubt. The things we do have all been done before, the things we find are only the lost things dropped by the too-full hands of others. It's all done just to keep us muddling along. Nature gives us certain beads to play with but only just so many. She's canny and she's close. When we've played with them all she hides them away, so that when they're found again they'll be like new. Oh, she takes us in finely with her old lost beads. But she doesn't fool me! I'll find her hidings because it pleases me but I'll not play with them. I throw them back to her—like that!" He made a gesture of one who tosses sand into the air.

"Cheerful old thing!" said David joyously. "Say John, you don't mean it, do you? You'll go ahead with this? Why, man, we'll have an engine that will lift the earth—ahem!—so to speak."

"Seeing that it's yours, you'll do as you please with it, no doubt."

"It isn't mine, it's yours."

"Then I'll do no more."

"John!"

"I'll do no more."

David began to whistle. "What's your ultimatum?" he asked, stopping suddenly.

"The engine is yours. It will be the Greig engine, or no engine at all!"

"It's not fair, John. I've only done this little bit."

"It's fair enough. Without this 'little bit,' the rest is nothing."

"Let it be the Baird-Greig engine then?"

"No."

"John, we've got to put it through. Men are wanting an engine like this; it's small space, it's power, it's simplicity! John," the boy's voice sank a note or two, "don't you want to see mankind the masters of the air?"

"I do not," said Baird firmly.

"I'd keep them from it if I could," went on the little man bitterly. "They're masterful enough as it is, pigmies and boasters! Only when the war comes, the great war that will wipe them out like frost wipes out the summer flies—then let them sail in the air if they will. They'll have the farther to fall."

"Well then," said David, seizing his opportunity, "let's get ready for the great war."

"Ah lad, if I thought you believed in it!"

David looked ashamed of himself.

"Well," he said uneasily, "I'd believe in it if I could just to please you. But I can't. I know that over in Europe the governments are always growling. It's what makes the wheels go round. Besides, it makes the Kings and the Kaisers feel big to shake a mailed fist occasionally. But do you think the civilised world would stand for war—real war?"

"Of course Russia and Japan didn't fight at all," said John smoothly, "they only stood up and shouted."

"That's different."

"It's a little farther away, if that is being different."

"It seems a whole lot farther away. It seems like the middle ages! Besides, they and the whole world, had a glimpse of what modern fighting might be. They won't risk it again."

"The whole world, or part of it, had also a glimpse of what victory might be, not a half-and-half compromise, but the real thing. And that glimpse will lure them on —to hell."

"The British people——"

"I am not talking about the British people."

"Then who in the deuce are you talking about?"

"At present I have in mind the German people, or rather the German Government. They have been preparing for war over there for years."

"War in the abstract, perhaps."

"Do the women of a country work regularly preparing surgical supplies for an abstraction? I know for a fact that for two years (and perhaps much longer) the German women have been rolling bandages. When these bandages are used the world will no longer smile behind its hand."

David tapped thoughtfully upon the table. He wished he knew more of European politics. He wished he could think of some sensible reason for the women of Germany rolling bandages. He had a swift vision of miles upon miles of bandages wound around the world's throat choking it to death!

"But John," he said slowly, "if you know these things the British Government knows them, too."

"They probably do."

"They can't. If they did, they would do something."

"Would they? If every unit in the British Empire is as hard to convince of danger as you, the Government of those units will do exactly what it is doing—nothing. We are a democratic nation, my son. Our government lives by our favour. Think of the howl were conscription mooted in the House of Commons."

"Conscription!"

"Exactly," said John dryly. "The tone of your voice answers your own question."

David laughed uneasily.

"You score there," he admitted. "But I wish I could argue with you properly. I am ignorant of European politics, even the more obvious ones. I've been bound up in Canada, or at most in the Empire and our friends to the South. You don't predict, I hope, that we are going to fight them?"

But the inventor was not to be diverted by pleasantry. He shook his head.

"No. This will be no family quarrel. The beast is something which growls outside."

"Well," David came back a little impatiently to the matter in hand, "if there's anything doing in the war line the sooner we get our engine out the better, and," with sudden caution, "I suppose the less we say about it the better also."

"The thing is yours. Do you as you like with it." John had relapsed into taciturnity.

David folded up the papers and sat down in his usual seat, the corner of the table.

"I shall never feel that it is mine," he said resolutely, "but if you insist on my calling it so, I must, of course, bear all the expense of its development. I'll explain to you how I stand financially."

Then briefly and clearly he gave John his first confidence. He told him of Angus, of Cousin Mattie, of the money left by Angus for the forwarding of his great ambition, of the house at Milhampton, of the workshop and the large field which had been the first purchase of his independence.

"For you see," said David, "if we are to build planes we will need room, and, John, we want to build the planes ourselves, don't we? Not just the engine, but the whole thing? Just think what it will be to fly—to fly with our own wings! Really fly! not just shoot up and falter down. They've done a lot, but no one knows better than you, John, how much there is still to do. Remember that stabilising idea we talked about the other night? If we could only work that out also! Don't you see, John? You'll let me help you, won't you?"

"The idea we talked about the other night was your idea, not mine."

"That doesn't matter, does it?"

"Not if you'll kindly refrain from fathering it on me."

"You mean it may not be a success?"

"I mean it may be a success," grimly.

"But——"

"What are you doing it for, boy—tell me that?" There was a note of strain in the inventor's voice which warned David that his answer was momentous. He thought for a moment and then——

"I am doing it because I want to do it," he said, "I want to do it more than I want anything else in the world."

"You put it before everything?" with poorly repressed eagerness.

"I think there's nothing greater than one's work," stubbornly.

"Then there's no girl in the question yet," said John dryly. "Willard's a liar. I thought he was!"

"Oh," said David. A wave of light surged in upon him. He blushed furiously.

"Eh?" questioned John suspiciously.

"There's no girl in the sense you mean. But Murray wasn't lying." Seeing that he was fairly caught, David took a long breath and plunged into the tale of his mock engagement. Not omitting many complimentary references to Miss Sims, her gentleness and her unprotected state. He also added, with a touch of uneasiness which did not escape the sharp ears listening to him, that as soon as Christmas was over the engagement would be over, too. Miss Sims was going home.

John Baird listened in silence. In his heart he felt incalculably relieved. The boy was sound. He had not been playing double. So far, his sole great devotion was for his work. But he was in danger. Any one with a blind eye could see that.

"David," he said at last, "I've never advised you. I never advise anybody. A wise man doesn't need advice and a fool won't take it. But you are only a boy. So this once I say to you, go away now, anywhere, and stay away till after Christmas!"

David laughed. Old John tried once more.

"That cousin of yours, doesn't she need you for a bit? Cousin Mattie you called her. Is she a real cousin?"

"No, there is no blood relationship. You remember I told you——"

"Yes, yes. And that father of yours, the real one. What did you say his name was?"

"I didn't say his name," said David coldly.

"Why?"

"I don't know it!"

"Umph!" said John Baird.

XVI

DAVID'S time-shortening recipe worked splendidly. The days flew by. He was young. He was happy. He had his work and his dreams. Besides, following his understanding with Clara, a certain restraint had been lifted. His estimate of her character had been amply vindicated. So what need now of keeping up the half-instinctive guard which was so plainly an insult to the girl's sincerity?

"He is getting over his first shyness," thought Miss Walker, noticing the change.

"Loosening up!" was Mr. Martin's comment.

Clara herself was very well satisfied with the result of her management. Once more she congratulated herself upon that knowledge of men which was her birthright. By seeming to do exactly as he wished she had turned David from a courteous yet cold knight-errant into an ordinary young man seeing no farther than his nose.

True, she had lost much of the zest of the chase, but she set her red lips and held on. Not by giving up David would she win Willard. His slackening interest might cease altogether then. Clara knew the value of jealousy and fondly hoped that Murray was jealous. Clever as she was, she must have been blind with respect to him. For jealousy was the last thing in Willard's thought of her. When David had told him of the Christmas arrangement, he had lazily concluded that his purpose was already accomplished and continued his intermittent attentions only because something in the hostile yielding of the girl flattered his vanity.

In regard to the other matter which lay so warmly in the depths of his heart, David did nothing. That is, he decided to do nothing, but he went so far as to ask Billy for the address of Madam Rameses, and one day, when the winter sky was as cloudless as the sky of his own life, he walked past her house. He assured himself that he had no intention of doing more. Perhaps he hadn't, but it is certain that he received a distinct shock of disappointment upon finding that any such intention was rendered futile by a flaming red placard announcing "Scarlet fever."

David stopped short and stared at the words. And as he stared he felt a creeping fear. *Who had scarlet fever?* The rosy mists which surrounded a certain autumn memory were in danger then of being rudely blown aside. He was very near to seeing how vital that memory was and, had he done so, he might have been spared much. But before the fear which chilled him had fully formed itself, there was a flashing glimpse of gold-bronze hair across the window. Whoever had scarlet fever it was not the girl who owned that glorious hair. David walked on. He could call again. There was no hurry!

From behind the window curtain Rosme saw him go. She saw only his profile as he passed, but somehow she knew that he had not come that way by chance. He had found out her address at last! How slow he had been. Yet how she liked his slowness, his diffidence. The fact that he had not forgotten her in all these weeks meant more than any easy haste to see her would have meant. How horrid that the Infant should have chosen just this time to take scarlet fever. Not that it really mattered. There was no hurry. It wouldn't hurt him to call again. Their meeting was surely coming: Spring was coming, summer was coming, life was coming! There was no hurry, none at all.

Rosme went up the stairs singing.

As she entered the room, Madam rose from a prolonged study of the sleeping Infant's face. She looked troubled.

"Is she worse?" asked Rosme quickly.

"No, much better. It isn't that. But I was just thinking—Rosme, she is beginning to look like her mother!"

Rosme, who knew something of that sad little history, guessed why there was trouble in Madam's kind eyes.

"Very little," she said, "to judge from your photographs. She is not nearly so pretty."

This seemed to comfort Madam.

"Do you believe in heredity, Rosme?"

"Why, I suppose so! Unless we all just grow, like Topsy."

Madam sighed.

"Anyway," she said, "I am glad that little Lucie shows no sign of being psychic. She is not at all like me. My dear, if I had thought more about nature's laws when I was a young girl I don't believe I would ever have married."

"Lots of other girls wouldn't, either," said Rosme thoughtfully. "Perhaps that's why nature doesn't allow it. She makes young girls careless and carefree, quite willing to leave the selection of future generations to Providence."

"But it seems so reckless!"

"What? Leaving it to Providence?" smiling.

"You know what I mean, dear. Isn't there anything at all that women can do?"

"Lots. But most of it is done unconsciously. We can accumulate all the good we can. It will all pass into the root-stock. Nature will use it some time. If not always for our own children, then for others farther down the line. As for the Infant, she is simply a darling and, as you say, "with a dimple," not in the least psychic."

"Oh, I know you think it all nonsense, my dear! But it isn't. Even when I was quite as small as Lucie I was different from other children though I did not know it. I thought every one saw what I saw. I thought it quite natural to see strange people in the room—people who did not seem to have anything to do with us or our life and had no concern with doors or walls or furniture."

"Gracious!" said Rosme, "ghosts! Madam, did you really see them?"

"I saw—people," stubbornly. "I very seldom see them now."

Involuntarily Rosme glanced over her shoulder. Madam's eyes twinkled.

"I could see what people were thinking, too, sometimes." She went on. "And until I learned to hide it, it made them very angry. The kind of anger you might feel for a thief who picked your pocket."

"I think," said Rosme shrewdly, "that you have picked my pocket, that way, more than once."

Madam shook her head. "Not just in the old way. I have largely lost the power. But I did have it. I shouldn't like you to think that it was all just faking. But the power I had was so undependable and so utterly beyond my own control that it was not very satisfactory material for experiment: Mr. Jasper would never believe this. He believed that faculties like mine could be cultivated and I—well, I did my best to do as he wished. Sometimes we did get results. Then my hand began to write. I don't undertsand that at all. But some of the messages seem to have value. Don't you think so?" The eagerness of the question seemed to the girl pathetic.

"It may be a kind of mental telepathy," she answered kindly. "You may be getting bits of what your sitters have in their own minds."

"Then," timidly, "you don't think it is all pretence?"

"Most of it must be," declared the girl with youthful decision. "I have never said anything, because it is no possible business of mine. But I have never felt sure whether you quite believed in it yourself or not——"

"Neither can I," interrupted Madam unexpectedly. "That is my great trouble. If I were sure it is all a fraud I would give it up gladly. No credit to me either, because with the money it has brought me I have bought this house and could get along by keeping boarders. But I'm not sure. The messages I get seem to be such a help to so many of the poor souls who come to me in such hopeless sorrow."

"But if you know that the comfort they get is false?"

"I don't know it," quickly. "Sometimes I think so and sometimes I don't, and there are still times when I am quite sure that however the messages come they do not come from me although they come *through* me."

Rosme's firm lips set themselves. "If it's not all straight and honest, it can't be good," said she. "We must be straight and honest whatever else we are. I believe you keep it up largely because you think it comforts people but we shouldn't comfort people at the expense of truth. Give them what little bits of truth we have and they will find comfort for themselves."

Madam Rameses smiled. Her smile was large and very pleasant. Some of her deprecating air seemed to fall away. "Well, my dear, you are probably right, but it always seems to me more human to give them the comfort and let them find the truth."

"You are a wicked old dear!" said Rosme, kissing her.

During the dull interval of the infant's convalescence, Rosme often found herself thinking of this conversation.

In matters concerning the abnormal, the interest felt by any normal person must be in direct ratio to the faith he has in his informant. Rosme believed the word of Madam Rameses utterly, therefore without further argument and in face of former prejudices she concluded that her friend had once possessed, and occasionally could still manifest, mysterious powers. The spell of the unusual and un-understood had found Rosme out.

"It must be rather fun to know what people are thinking," she remarked one day, tentatively.

But Madam had no intention of encouraging her suddenly awakened interest.

"It is not fun at all," she answered. "It is quite unpleasant."

"Why?"

"Because violated privacy is always unpleasant for both parties."

Rosme made a face. "That sounds like a motto in a copy-book. And they were nearly always fibs! Do you remember one morning after I came back from Milhampton? You asked me if anything special had happened at the office? Were you reading my mind then?"

Madam Rameses looked uncomfortable. "Not exactly, my dear, or perhaps I was, in a sense. I remember that I had a distant impression that something quite important had happened to you since I saw you last."

"Did you know what it was?"

"Well—I had an impression—I thought that you had probably met some one who had excited your interest greatly. You were all alert and shaken up."

"That's it exactly," said the girl with a relieved air. "I had met some one who had wakened me up. It was a boy I knew when I was a little girl. I didn't know him well, but he had appealed to my imagination. He wasn't like other boys. You see, he came into the garden over the wall and disappeared again into thin air. If he had come back through the gate I should probably have forgotten him long ago. But you needn't look like that, he's engaged. At least, I think he is engaged. There was a girl at the station to meet him. A girl with a big hat and a soft white face with droopy eyes. A sort of pussy-willow girl."

"Pussy-willows are nice, fluffy things, aren't they?"

"Yes, but they turn into cats over night."

"Then, my dear, your young man is probably fond of cats."

"U—um, I wonder? And he's not my young man, don't dream it. It's only that he comes from the same town. He came to call on me the other day, but couldn't on account of the quarantine."

Madam's compelling eyes seized the girl's and held them. Rosme blushed and dimpled. Madam felt dismayed. Surely this child whom she had thought safe for a long time yet had not already set her foot upon the perilous way of womanhood?

"But my dear," she exclaimed, "if the young man is engaged——"

"Perhaps he isn't!" said Rosme hopefully.

"Oh Rosme, how foolish!"

The foolish one nodded. Rosme was always willing to admit her foolishness.

"We must find out about the young man at once," went on Madam briskly. "I feel sure that he is a very ordinary person."

"Ordinary persons are so nice," said the girl with a sigh, "unless they are too, too ordinary! But cheer up. You shall see this youth and judge him. Perhaps the real name of my trouble is curiosity. I am dying to know about that girl."

"It would be wise," assented Madam, gravely.

"You couldn't go into a trance or anything, could you?"

"Certainly not," said Madam offended. Then, catching sight of the girl's face, "Rosme, are you really interested—like that?"

The bronze head nodded. "Just like that!" said Rosme with a rueful smile. "But I don't know how much 'that' is at present. I did like David (his name is David) and I want to see him again. Besides, for the last day or two I have felt uneasy. I don't know whether it's living in the house with you, dear pickpocket, or not, but I just feel as if something, something terribly unfortunate were going to happen to him."

"That," said Madam firmly, "is entirely imagination."

"It doesn't matter what you call a thing, if it keeps you awake at night."

"Why Rosme, my dear!"

"She was s-such a h-horrid girl!" Without the slightest warning Rosme began to cry.

"I shall call the doctor!" said Madam, in agitation, "you are sickening for scarlet fever!"

"I'm n-not," sobbed Rosme, "I can cry if I like. I haven't had a g-good cry for years!"

The same night, the night when Rosme felt that she might without selfishness indulge in a good cry, David in pursuance of his desire to give Miss Sims a good time, was escorting that lady home from an evening on the ice. They had had a very good time and as they walked through the frosty night after leaving the car, the thought came to David with something of regret that these good times were nearly over. Clara, apparently, had been thinking the same thing.

"David, do you realise that it's only a week till Christmas?"

"Rather! And I haven't got Cousin Mattie's present yet. Do you know what I've thought of?"

"No," Clara's tone was not encouraging. She did not want to talk about Cousin Mattie.

"A cat, a Persian cat—kitten, I mean. I know a fellow who has a good one. Blue! Can't you feel that Cousin Mattie would adore a blue cat?"

"They are very delicate."

"Are they? Cousin Mattie will love that. She will have the time of her life taking care of it."

Clara said nothing.

"Don't you like cats?" asked David.

Clara did not seem certain about her feeling for cats. She said yes and then she said no and both in the abstracted manner of one whose mind is not on the subject.

"When do you go down to Milhampton?" she asked abruptly.

"A day or two before Christmas. I'll have the fortnight with Cousin Mattie afterwards."

"Then—I'll not be here when you get back."

"No, I suppose not," said David. "Too bad, isn't it?"

They had come in out of the crisp air to the warm stuffiness of Mrs. Carr's parlour. It was late and the other boarders had gone to bed. On the table lay a note in Mrs. Carr's handwriting requesting Mr. Greig to be so kind as to turn out the light. This meant that Mrs. Carr had also retired.

"I wish," said David, "that you had let me be the one to make a move. It doesn't matter so much where a man boards."

"I suppose," said Clara slowly, "that at first it will be rather—lonely."

"Same here," said David sincerely. He felt indeed that the girl's going would make a big difference. He felt that loneliness already. And she, too, would be lonely. There was something vaguely pathetic about Clara as she stood there. Her fur seemed too heavy for her, her hat too shadowy. Under it her face looked very white.

She was not, in fact, dissembling. She felt tired and discouraged to-night, and sad. Willard had been more than usually remiss in his careless attentions. Clara, the indomitable, felt like crying and, in spite of the reality of her emotions, was not yet beyond making practical use of them.

She allowed big tears to gather and stand in her eyes. She allowed her lip to quiver. Then with a weary gesture drew the hatpins from her hat and flung it on the table. (David might not have seen the tears with her hat on!)

"Oh, I say, don't!" said David. The protective instinct was very strong in him. He came a step nearer. Clara's eyes brimmed over and she raised her handkerchief. David watched her distractedly. He was taller than she and her head was bent so that he looked directly down upon the smooth, softly shining folds of her dark hair, upon the narrow, snow-white parting where it waved aside to gather itself up again in the low coil behind.

If he took her in his arms, her head would rest exactly on his shoulder! If he kissed her——

He very nearly did kiss her! The impulse was a strong one. It passed, but it left behind an uncertainty of purpose and a confusion of outlook which David had never experienced before. It was a state of mind which entirely satisfied Miss Sims. She raised her head gently, dried her tears with simple dignity and said good-night.

David felt so sorry for her that he forgot to turn out Mrs. Carr's lights.

In spite of all this, in spite of Rosme's presentiment and Clara's cleverness and his own carelessness, David might have escaped if circumstances had not taken a hand. The particular circumstance which settled things was the death of Clara's mother.

Clara had known for some time that her mother was ill. She had not mentioned it because she knew that David would expect her to hurry home at once. She had no intention of going home. It would have spoiled her plans, and she detested illness of any kind. Still, in her heart, she had some fondness for her mother and news of her actual death shocked and startled her. Her grief was real enough. And it was this reality which was David's conqueror.

When he came home one evening, with Cousin Mattie's blue kitten in a box under his arm, and found the girl, a huddled, shaking form, crying in the dim parlour from which the boarders had considerately withdrawn, the last of his instinctive guards went down.

He took her in his arms and tried to comfort her.

The girl had sobbed out her loneliness, her tiredness, her fear of what life might do to her. She had clung to him like a frightened child, who is yet a woman, and David had wiped her eyes with his handkerchief and kissed her.

Incidentally he said a great many things which appeared to be comforting.

She ceased to sob with her head on his shoulder and her hand in his. She was very glad to do this. He wasn't Murray, but he was better than nobody. And down beneath her grief she felt a stab of triumph—for David had asked her to marry him!

David went to bed that night in a generous glow. He expected to stay awake a long time enjoying it. But he fell asleep almost at once. For a time he slept heavily —then he had a dream.

He dreamed that he was standing in the workshop at home. The well known place was full of deep dusk. There was an aromatic smell of fresh shavings. In the far corner he could see the finished bride's chest. It stood out in its burnished beauty more plainly than the rest of the room, for over it and around flowed a soft light and in the light, its centre and source, he saw, as he had seen once before, the figure of his young mother. She was bending over the chest, her shadowy fingers tracing the lovely lines of the carved top. She looked very beautiful and very sad. David stirred restlessly and muttered in his sleep. He was feeling the old sense of rebellion which had shaken him when Mattie had told him her tragic story. He would not let his almost unbearable pity have its way.

"Any one who makes a mistake like that," he said aloud, "must make it through his own fault. If one would only use common sense——"

He spoke the words so loudly that the noise of them awoke him. He sat up with their echo ringing in his ears.

"Any one who makes a mistake—a mistake—a mistake —his own fault,—common sense—his own fault——" then the confusion cleared and memory came back.

He lay back and smiled. It is the proper thing to smile when one is engaged. He had smiled last night as he went to sleep. He had been full of a warm glow.

He tried now to recall the glow. He tried very hard. But the glow was gone. He felt cold. So cold that he shivered.

He closed his eyes and saw again the still, carven beauty of the bride's chest. He saw the delicate, tragic beauty of his mother for whom it had been conceived and for a moment he glimpsed, far off and in a rosy mist, another face—a vivid delicate face with slender lips and hair that gleamed!

He opened his eyes very widely to shut out the vision. Nor did he sleep again. The rest of that night he spent in realising—things!

BOOK III: THE CLEARING OF THE MIST

I

SINCE the day, now some ten years ago, when, with one short sentence, we married Frances Selwyn to young Dr. Holtby we have said nothing whatever about her. This is not because there was nothing to say but because the saying of it would require a book in itself; a book which would be occupied mainly with the doings of Dr. Holtby and the three little Holtbys, Annabel, Paula and John. These four persons made up Frances' world, a world just as big, and no bigger, than her heart.

Rosme came in, too, but more and more as an incidental. Long ago Rosme had refused to settle down and to become a part of Frances' snug little sphere. This refusal had been inexplicable to Frances. It belonged to that part of Rosme which she had never understood.

"She could be so happy here with us," she had said to her husband. "She would be quite free, of course. If she wishes so much to be independent she might take a few music pupils. Quite nice girls do that. And think how interesting it would be for her to watch Bella and Paula and John growing up!"

The father of Bella and Paula and John hid a smile behind his fair moustache. He was often puzzled by his wife's cousin but not in this instance. Nor was he altogether sorry that Rosme had wider views. He liked her but was never quite at his ease in her company. He suspected her of being clever, and he did not like clever women. They are apt to think that they know more than men, which is absurd. Rosme was a brightness in his house but she was also a spur. She seemed always to be expecting him to do something. As if he wasn't doing things from morning till night? Still, argue it as he would, the doctor knew that she stirred some restless longing which usually slept placidly in the depths of his kindly, commonplace soul. Frances, on the contrary—well, he had made no mistake in marrying Frances!

The children loved "Aunt Rosme," and admired her even more. To them she stood for adventure, change, a breath of the Outside. Her comings and goings were events in their small lives and the candy she brought them made them the envied of all observing friends. *They* did not wonder that a being so favoured should refuse to settle down. Why should she, when the train could take her to places where the candy was so much better?

But the real struggle came when Rosme went to board with Madam Rameses. It was the last straw. Frances called heaven and her husband to witness that she was not a snob, but a common spiritualist for a landlady she could not stand!

"But she isn't a common spiritualist!" Rosme had protested. "She is beautifully uncommon."

Frances said that was worse.

"She's got a darling little grandchild, too," said the wily Rosme.

But even the grandchild did not pacify Frances.

"I must think first," said she, "of Bella, and Paula and John!"

Rosme laughed.

"If you won't listen to me," wailed Frances, "at least you might listen to John. He is a man of the world and knows exactly how nice people regard these things."

"I know that myself. It's not at all difficult," cheerfully, "to know what nice people think. They tell you without a struggle."

"And you don't care?"

"Not a lu-lu!"

"But why?"

"Because I know better."

This was what always silenced Frances. It was Rosme's "knowing better" which she would not combat. It was an outward sign of a spiritual state beyond her ken. Frances herself had never "known better." Save in the one instance of her marriage she had never dared to set up her own opinion as arbiter. And Rosme didn't care a lu-lu!

"I hope," she said stiffly, "that you will not use slang like that before the children. You might teach it to little John."

"Not a chance!" said Rosme, "it was little John who taught it to me! He says it with the dearest lisp."

The shock of this information finished the discussion for the day. Frances' fears for Rosme vanished before her fears for little John.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed, "it must be that new little boy next door. If I lived on a desert island I might be able to bring up my children as I wish."

Rosme thought this unlikely. "The monkeys," she said, "would be almost certain to teach them to shy coconuts!"

The remonstrances of Dr. Holtby (on his wife's behalf) faired little better. Rosme listened dutifully and went her own way.

"And you know, dear," she comforted Frances, "it needn't make a bit of difference, because no one here need know a thing about it."

This was true. Since Aunt had died leaving her money to the church, Milhampton society had steadily taken less interest in Miss Rosme Selwyn.

Almost the only people who asked after her now were old Mr. Burbage the lawyer, whom Frances saw but seldom, and Miss Mattie Greig whom she saw once a wee at Sunday morning service.

"You see," Miss Mattie had explained herself onc "I often think of your young cousin because she lives i Toronto, like Davy. It is a sort of bond, don't yo think?"

Frances hastened to admit that it was a bond. Sh liked Miss Mattie. For a woman who has never had an of her own, Miss Mattie knew a great deal about children and had more than once given good advice in th upbringing of Annabel and Paula and John. She ha recognised Paula's measles before the doctor had and sh had recommended the only remedy which had been th least use in the case of John's bronchitis. So tactfully too. The doctor had not minded in the least.

On this last Sunday before Christmas, 1913, these tw ladies walked home from church together and discusse the likelihood of whooping-cough for John. It was year when everybody had it. They also discussed Rosme's latest letter and whether it would be quite safe fo her to come down for Christmas seeing that the littl girl where she boarded had so lately recovered fro fever?

"Of course Rosme will be properly disinfected," sai Frances. "And the doctor says it will be quite saf He insists that I tell her to come. But if John ha whooping-cough——"

"He hasn't!" assured Miss Mattie. "I can tell whooping-cough a block away. He hasn't got it."

"That is what the doctor says," agreed Frances. "S unless he whoops to-night, I shall feel fairly safe. Bu as I was going to tell you, I have a letter from Rosm in which she mentions your nephew. Is it nephew o cousin? I am so stupid about relationships."

"Oh, has she been talking to David?" Miss Matti grew quite pink with pleasure. "Do you know I have always thought it strange that they didn't see more of each other."

"Well," said Frances with a knowing smile, "if what Rosme says is true, Mr. Greig's time has been pretty well occupied. I think I have the letter in my muff. I thought you would like to know—although, of course, you know already——"

Somewhat awkwardly, on account of her warmly gloved hands, Frances unfolded Rosme's letter——

"She says—um—no, that's not it. Here it is—*'There is little news which will interest you except that Madam'* —um—that's not it either! Oh, here it is—*'There is a report that an old Milhampton boy, David Greig, is engaged to be married. I think you know his cousin——'* Why, Miss Mattie, what's the matter?"

Miss Mattie had suddenly grasped Frances' arm with a strength that hurt. But upon the other's surprised exclamation she released it with equal suddenness. The pink in her cheeks had grown much pinker.

"Hadn't you heard?" asked Frances in perplexity.

Miss Mattie, although plainly annoyed at her own agitation, was able to smile at this.

"I haven't heard, my dear, because there is nothing to hear. But just for the moment you startled me. I seem quite unable," ruefully, "to accustom myself to the idea of David's marrying."

"Then it isn't true?"

"The report? No, certainly not. David has had no thought of anything of the kind. He is utterly indifferent to girls—so far. But naturally he will marry some day. I truly hope that he will."

The tone in which David's cousin "truly hoped" for David's marriage brought a smile to Frances' lips though in her heart she thoroughly understood. She, too, would feel like that when Bella and Paula and John, especially John, should be grown up. She wondered if by any chance——

"Of course he wouldn't have done it without telling you, dear Miss Mattie?" The remark was an assertion but the tone was faintly questioning.

Miss Mattie drew herself up with gentle dignity.

"There is no possibility of that," she said. "You may deny the report absolutely."

Frances felt snubbed and perhaps a trifle doubtful. Boys, she guessed, do not tell their maiden cousins everything. Still it is pleasant to speak as one having authority and no echo of her doubt disturbed the confidence of her answer to Rosme that night.

"As for the rumour concerning young David Greig's engagement," she wrote, *"I happen to know that it is entirely unfounded. He is not engaged and not likely to be. You may deny the report positively."*

This was the last paragraph of the letter but it was the one which Rosme read first. As she read it her smile flashed out and vanished into her dimple. Without any (admitted) reason she felt suddenly happier. For Frances must have had the denial straight from David's cousin and David's cousin must *know*.

The Christmas of 1913 will always be distinguished from former Christmases because it was just like them. One would have expected it to be different. One would have thought that in some way the world might have sensed the coming of the Red Deluge. There must have been those in palaces that day who listened to the peace of the Christmas bells and smiled behind their hands. There must have been many in the churches that morning who read the words: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

But they had no sense of the meaning of words so balefully prophetic!

The world was at peace. The newspapers were full of politics and strikes, the woman's suffrage campaign and the Irish question. There were those who shook their heads and spoke of civil war in Ireland, but for the most part men smiled tolerantly, advising both parties to "call the bluff" of the other. No one exactly envied the British Government its job, but it would muddle through somehow. It always had.

But war, save perhaps in those "high places," was undreamed of. War, European war, British war, war that would beckon Canada across the sea, war that would touch our jaunty Uncle Samuel on the shoulder with a "Steady, you're wanted, too!"—war which would mean nothing less than the call of blood and honour to the English speaking race to stand together, backs against the wall and faces to an inconceivable barbarism; war that might demand our last son and our last shell just to keep the earth fit for decent folk to live in—*that* kind of war would have been laughed at with the whole-hearted laughter of sane men in Canada and the United States on Christmas Day, 1913.

David had been right about the blue cat. Cousin Mattie adored it. When David presented it, artistically concealed in a blue hat box with a blue ribbon around its blue neck, Miss Mattie, abandoning all pretense of years and dignity, sat upon the floor and hugged it. Hugging cats, especially new, blue cats who object to being hugged, is an occupation in itself. It takes one's mind off other things. That is why Miss Mattie did not notice at once that David was distrait and thoughtful, with the beginning of a worried little crease between his handsome brows. When she did notice it she instantly referred its cause to the sorrow inseparable from a homecoming without Angus. She herself knew how well nigh unbearable this first Christmas would have been without David and his need of her. So wise Miss Mattie asked no questions. She petted the cat and made the old house cheery. She allowed no cold mantle of silence to fall between them and the one they missed. Indeed David found himself insensibly learning more of his foster father than he had ever found out for himself. Love is a skilful interpreter and Mattie, David realised, had loved Angus with a rare and selfless devotion which asked only the privilege of giving.

The boy himself was very silent. It was good to be allowed to be silent. He was oppressed with the sense of a great deal of thinking to be done. There were things to face, things to arrange, plans to make, a definite course to measure and pursue. A lot of hard, straight thinking seemed an immediate necessity. Over and over again he told himself this. Over and over again he sat down to do it and over and over again his thoughts battered and scattered themselves against a stubborn resistance within him—a something which absolutely refused to accept the future which his will sought to impose upon it.

"I can't think!" he declared, starting up from one of these futile struggles. "I seem to have lost control of my brain."

Miss Mattie looked up from feeding the blue cat. She thought that this outburst was in answer to a question of hers which David had not even heard.

"But surely you can tell me a suitable name without thinking," said she, "you must know something about Persia. And she is a Persian, isn't she? And she's blue. Try to remember something Persian and blue, with a soft, silky sound, like her fur. If you can't, I know I'll end by calling her Alice. She has to have a name and the only blue thing I can think of is Alice."

"Blue—Alice?" repeated David in bewilderment.

"Yes," patiently, "Alice-blue. You've heard of that, I hope? Only that's American, not Persian. Can't you think of something Persian?"

"I can't think of *anything!*"

"Then don't try. Your brain must be quite tired out. I don't mind calling her Alice,—for heaven's sake, David, look out for her tail!"

David avoided the tail of Alice by a miracle and drew himself up with an impatient sigh. Miss Mattie rose also.

"Davy dear, you're not fretting about anything special, are you?"

The boy put an arm around her.

"I want to think," he said, "I must think! and I can't."

"No use trying when you feel like that, laddie. There's times when we're just intended to go a step at a time. You're more tired than you know."

"I can't rest until I've thought."

"You can't think until you rest. Tut, Davy! You're not a fretful child. You're a grown man. Put it all away, whatever it is, and just go on. Sometimes we're safest when we're walking blind."

David put out his hands with a helpless gesture.

"I seem to have stumbled into a mist," he said, "it is closing up—all around!"

"Maybe it's just the mist of morning, Davy. You are so young."

He shook his head.

"I don't feel young, Mattie, why is life so easy to spoil, and why are we left alone to spoil it?"

Miss Mattie felt a sharp prick of new anxiety. There was a bitterness in the boy's voice which did not sound like the grief of a son for his father.

"We're not," she said. "Be sure of that, Davy. We're not let spoil it."

"But we do! Angus spoiled his, my mother spoiled hers, you——"

"No, I didn't spoil mine. Don't dream it. But what you need just now isn't argument. You need fresh air. Stop sitting glowering at the fire and take some cranberry jelly over to Mrs. Allen. When you come back we will talk about spoiled lives, if you feel like it."

Ten minutes in the open air of a glorious December day did more for David than even Miss Mattie had anticipated. His sombre imaginings melted away like his breath in the frosty air. His mind took tone and sparkle from the sparkle of the powdery snow. It was pleasant, too, to meet friends who passed him with a cordial smile or stopped him for a handshake and a word. The merry shrieks of the children coasting on the side streets, the sleigh-bells on the avenue, the Christmas hurry on the Main Street all helped to restore in him a proper sense of proportion. His own problems dwindled and the unquenchable optimism of youth shook itself free from dark foreboding. By the time he had reached Mrs. Allen and delivered his cranberry jelly David was himself again.

The old interests came rushing back. He found himself thinking again of Millhampton as the background for his great experiment. His critical eye observed once more with satisfaction the unique advantages of its position and environment for the work he was so impatient to begin. He must have Baird down.

It might be possible to kindle even in that doubting breast some spark of enthusiasm.

"John's simply got to get excited!" declared David to himself. He marched on cheerily. The sun was hidden now, and the air had that softer feeling which precedes snow. Presently the flakes began to fall, big, lazy beautiful flakes which lay like fairy stars on the rough tweed of his coat. He did not notice particularly where he was going until a long stretch of uncleared sidewalk informed him unpleasantly that he was passing the old Ridley place, now long empty. Renting had proved unsatisfactory and no buyer had as yet been found who would pay the price demanded by the church.

The iron gate was shut and locked. Over the lawns and gravel sweep the snow lay deep and untouched, billowed into curious curves and hollows by the wind. Snow hung upon the closed shutters as upon the eyelashes of one long asleep, the roof had drawn its white cowl close. The cedar trees stood straight and white like sentinels before it.

David's step slowed. His eyes grew merry. How vividly that hot summer day came back; the closely shuttered house, the clipped lawn, the pointing shadows of the cedars. Then the quick opening of the front door and against the cool darkness that bizarre little figure in turban and shawl.

"You boy! Go round to the back, directly!" How she had stamped her foot!

Beneath the wall which now, as then, hid the back garden, the uncleaned snow was deeper still. The wall itself was topped by two feet of rounded whiteness, and even at that it wasn't so high! He remembered the stilts and laughed that the scaling of it should have seemed so great an achievement.

Why, now he could—just to show what he could do now, he left the sidewalk and with a spring attempted to grapple with the top of the wall. But he had not allowed for the deceptive nature of snow. He caught at something, felt it slipping, essayed another frantic clutch, and came down ignominiously, bringing a large and lumpy mound of snow on top of him.

A gurgle, a positive gurgle of laughter brought him to his feet, tingling.

He had forgotten that there might be people on the street!

But it wasn't people, it was only a person.

"And now 'tis little joy," quoted the person gleefully, "to know I'm farther off from heaven than when I was a boy."

"Did you say heaven?" asked David politely.

"Yes, meaning by that anything just over a wall."

"I could have done it easily if that snow hadn't slipped," grumbled David, dusting himself. "It isn't a high wall at all."

"It *has* shrunk!" agreed Rosme critically. "I remember when it was so high it seemed to have no top! What were you going to do when you got over, Mr. Greig?"

"Oh, nothing!" in confusion.

"You are sure you weren't going to burgle?" with some eagerness. "Because I am going to be a burglar myself and burglars like company."

"Then I am a burglar," said David. "I must be, for I recognise the symptoms."

"But are you a brave one? Shall you mind if the church catches you at it?"

"I defy the church to catch me at it."

"Right! Come on then—we'll climb over the back gate."

This was easy enough but their further progress in the deep, unbroken snow caused misgiving in the mind of the burglar-in-chief.

"Even the church," he observed, "might almost suspect that some one had passed this way."

"Yes—elephants!" laughed Rosme. "But if you want to do things right you can cover up our tracks by rolling in them."

"Thanks."

"Aren't you a bit curious? Don't you want to know what I am going to burgle?"

"All I am anxious about is my share."

"How about a basis of fifty-fifty?"

"That sounds fair."

"Have you got a jimmy?"

"If I am a burglar, I must have."

"Well, keep it in your pocket. We shan't need it. I know a window whose catch is broken. All you have to do is to raise the window and help me in."

"Not at all," firmly, "I have to get in myself."

"It is not necessary."

"Excuse me. In polite burgles it is always done."

Laughing, they continued their elephantine progress through the drifts until the broken window was reached. It looked rather high up.

"I suppose there are keys?" observed David, as if in soliloquy.

"There are. But the church has them. Am I going to ask the church for keys to get into my own house?"

"Certainly not!"

"Very well, then, bring that barrel."

David brought the barrel. It wabbled rather badly.

"After all," said Rosme thoughtfully, "you had better go in first. Then you can pull me up. It will be the easiest way."

It was, in fact, not easy. But with time and severe exercise it was done.

Rosme flicked the snow from her skirt and sniffed the deathly cold air of the empty house with the satisfaction of purpose accomplished. David sniffed also but quite otherwise.

"I don't know what we came for but I know what we're going to get," he observed with prophetic gloom.

"What?"

"Pneumonia."

"Oh well, that's not stealing. Any one can take pneumonia. But only burglars can take——"

"Yes?"

"What doesn't belong to them! I thought you weren't curious?"

"Neither I am."

"This," with a gesture, "is only the dining-room. The object we seek is not here."

David looked around the big bare room with its darkened windows and repressed a shiver.

"Not exactly cheerful, is it?" asked Rosme, "but all the more like old times on that account. Here is the front hall."

"I remember the front hall!" said David with pride.

"You?"

"Yes. It was here that I received the first humiliation of my young life. I was stamped at by a little girl and told to go round to the back!"

"Oh—I remember! You brought a parcel—and wakened Aunt. So horrid of you!"

"It was you who wakened Aunt—when you stamped."

They both glanced down at the trim foot whose long silent echo had wakened Aunt. And something in the chill emptiness of the house numbed the laugh upon their lips.

Rosme opened a door to their left and they passed through. They were now in the first of the large square rooms. Through the closed shutters of the snow banked windows a cold and ghostly twilight filtered. Save for the chandeliers and the fireplace there was nothing in either room, only the barest of staring walls.

"These," said Rosme, "are the Forbidden Rooms and it is here that we find the—what is the proper name of the thing we find, Mr. Burglar?"

"De swag," said David promptly.

"Swag, that's right. This is where we find de swag! Are you trembling?"

"I feel a tremble coming on."

Rosme looked around her uncertainly. For the first time she exhibited traces of nervousness.

"I forgot," she murmured, "that there wouldn't be any chairs."

David remarked that he hadn't thought of it either. "We should have notified the church that we needed chairs," he said.

Rosme's dimples showed.

"But as we didn't," she decided, "I fear I am forced to admit you into the whole conspiracy. Needing your help I am compelled to trust you. The precious object which I came to get hangs upon yonder chandelier. You will have to climb up and get it."

"Certainly."

David walked over to the chandelier and gazed at it. He found that he could touch the bottom of it quite nicely.

"It's higher up than that," said Rosme. "It's one of those crystal prisms, the short ones around the centre."

"Any particular one?" politely.

"Yes, there's only one that's loose. It's *that* one. Don't you see? It hangs a little crooked."

Standing on tip-toe and stretching his arm almost out of its socket, David was still a good foot below the desired object. Instead of touching it he lost his balance and came down upon his heels with a thud which echoed startlingly through the desolation of the house.

"Oh, don't!" said the girl under her breath. The old fear of noise in that house had swept down upon her out of its silences.

"Do you really want it?" asked David seriously.

"Yes. It isn't as silly as it seems. When I was a lonely little child it was the loveliest plaything I had. And when little Lucie was so ill with fever I told her about it; about the beautiful dancing fairy lights it makes upon the wall and—and a great deal of nonsense no doubt! The result was that she wanted it! She wanted it so badly and she was so ill that one night I promised her that if she was good and didn't fret and did what the doctor said I would get it for her. *And I'm going to get it!* Couldn't you climb up on something?"

"I could," said David. "It has been clearly stated by the poet that 'men may rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things.' If I had a dead self here I could do it in a jiffy."

Rosme stamped her foot. Then she was very sorry she had stamped it.

"Does the hook come undone easily?" asked David ignoring the stamp.

"Yes."

"Then there is one simple thing to do. I will lift you up and you will unhook it."

"But——"

"The only other thing would be for you to lift me up and I——"

"Don't be silly!"

"Or we might haul in the barrel."

"Oh, could we?"

"We could. It would only take an hour or so."

Rosme put down her muff and peeled off her gloves without further comment. There was a little scarlet spot on one cheek but her lips were set in a line which precluded dimples.

"Very well," she said. "Lift me up."

With businesslike promptitude David lifted her. He had a moment's feeling of thankfulness that he was tall and strong and steady.

"Another inch!" said Rosme sharply.

David lifted her another inch.

"Got it!"

He lowered her gently to the floor.

The scarlet spot in her cheek was gone. With the faintly shimmering thing in her hand she dropped him a courtesy.

"The perfect burglar!" she mocked, "if ever you need a testimonial apply to me."

"Thanks. Will you put in it—'jimmys, barrels, pulleys, ladders and pneumonia provided while you wait?' The only thing in my burglarious repertoire which you have not now sampled is a getaway."

"I think I can manage that myself, thank you."

"For that, then, there will be no charge."

David picked up the muff and tendered it.

"Plant de swag before de cop lamps it," he advised kindly.

Rosme, restraining a refractory dimple, slipped the crystal into the muff.

The early winter twilight had crept up so quickly that there in the shut-up room it was almost dark. He heard the girl catch her breath quickly as they turned to go.

"I'm glad it was here and not in the other rooms," she said. "Aunt seldom came here. But all the rest of the house is haunted—it must be haunted! No one could ever live here and be happy, I am sure."

"Nonsense! Evil cannot be as powerful as all that."

"You don't know! I think it is powerful. Horribly, terribly powerful. Why does it say in the Lord's prayer, 'Deliver us from evil?' I tell you that in this house I can fairly—Oh, David! what's that?"

"That," was a quick sharp tapping which sounded from the floor above.

"An icy branch against the window," said David promptly.

"Yes—of course. Let us hurry."

Her tone was steady enough. Yet David could see that she was trembling. All the old, dark memories were stretching out their grasping hands. He hurried her alone to the open window.

"All serene!" he called after a preliminary survey of the barrel. "I'll go first. Then you sit on the window-sill—this way; and jump—like this; I'll catch you!"

But before David had properly picked himself up from the snow bank, something light landed with a soft flop beside him.

"I thought you might charge extra for catching!" explained Rosme.

"How are you feeling now, David?" asked Miss Mattie when he came in.

"Ravenous!" cried David, kissing her.

"Then run along, for supper's ready in five minutes, and there's a letter upstairs on your dresser."

"A letter?"—there was only one person from whom David might expect a letter! At supper he found that he wasn't so very hungry after all.

III

DAVID did not finish his fortnight with Miss Mattie. He wanted to get away, back to grim John Baird and to hard work. Clara, so her letter informed him, would not be returning to Toronto for at least three weeks. And when she did return she intended to change her boarding place. *"Now that we are going to be married,"* she wrote, *"it may perhaps show better taste."*

David smiled a trifle cynically over that! But he did not smile as he read on.

"I shall take a room with Carrie Brown. We can have the use of the parlour anytime we like for Carrie hasn't a beau at present!"

David, then, was a "beau." And there were other phrases in the letter quite as agonising. Clara lost much of her adaptability when she attempted to write a letter.

In a postscript she asked if he had told Cousin Mattie yet. No, he hadn't told Cousin Mattie! That was partly his reason for hurrying back to Toronto. He felt that she should be told and that he could tell her better from a distance. If she could not see his face she might think that everything was right.

The other reason for his hurry was Miss Rosme Selwyn. Both Miss Mattie and Frances, now that they knew of the acquaintance, were full of benevolent plans for letting the young people see a lot of each other. It had been very pleasant. So pleasant that David was running away.

Even the healthy young blizzard which had blown up suddenly and raged all day did not deter him, neither did old Mickey, the baggage man, squinting a speculative eye upon the weather.

"Where is that train of yours, Mickey?" shouted David. "Doesn't she know she's five minutes late?"

"She's considerable late," said Mickey, "and bedad she's likely to be later! If you'd telephoned I'd have told you. There's others as has more sinse."

"Perhaps, but you can't prove it! Anyway Cousin Mattie won't have a telephone. She says they're demoralizing. She says the first thing she knew she'd be telephoning down to the butcher and putting temptation in the poor man's way to send her any kind of meat he liked."

"They do that indeed, bad cess to thim!"

"As for this blow," continued David, "it's just a local flurry. Nothing to tie-up the line?"

Mickey half closed a foreboding eye.

"Local, is it?" he inquired. "But maybe you'll be forgetting Johnston's Cut?"

Johnston's Cut was indeed the thorn in the side of this stretch of well-built road-bed. It was a deep cutting just out of Cedarvale, about twenty-five miles farther down the line. A local blizzard and Johnston's Cut had been known to work havoc far beyond their apparent importance.

But David pooh-poohed Johnston's Cut and cracked a mild joke with Mickey when the train whistled, only twenty minutes late. She came puffing in, almost beautiful with her white enshrouded coaches and her ploughing front piled high with powdery snow.

David sprang up the step before the wheels had ceased grinding and hurried into the warm, sparsely-filled car. He did not look out through the snow-spattered windows, so he missed the dramatic arrival of a small whirlwind in navy-blue serge and a turban trimmed with fur.

Rather irritably he turned to see who had opened the door letting in a rush of cold air.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the whirlwind, stamping mounds of snow from her neat brown boots and shaking cascades of the same from her small furred hat. "This is the very nearest I've ever been! Every other time that I've been this near I've lost it."

This remark was made apparently to all and sundry. But when the whirlwind had wiped the wet snow from her long eyelashes she blinked amicably at David and smiled.

"I didn't think you were returning so soon," stammered David awkwardly.

"Another five seconds and you would have been right," crisply. "That is what comes of telephoning to Mickey."

"Oh," said David laughing. "Then you are the 'others as has more sinse.' Mickey told me, but he did not mention names. Hadn't you better take your coat off until it dries?"

Rosme thought she had and together they draped it over the back of an empty seat.

"Plenty of room," said she, looking around. "Frances didn't want me to come, but the telegram from the office was so urgent I felt I ought to. I wish she knew that you are going too. It would ease her mind."

"Perhaps Cousin Mattie will tell her. But there is nothing to feel nervous about."

David indeed felt his spirits mounting with marvellous rapidity. Say what you will about luck, things sometimes arrange themselves with singular felicity. Circumstances were doing for him what he would have hesitated greatly to do for himself. They were making him a present, as it were, of some golden hours which he might have been too honest to take.

"Your hat is wet, too," he ventured. It wasn't very wet but he wanted badly to see her with her hair uncovered.

Rosme removed the hat. The wet had waved her hair as a sea breeze waves shining water, and little, charming, seaweedy tendrils clung about her ears and at the curve of her neck. David felt an ache in his heart.

Her eyes, he thought, were green; translucent, lovely green, hiding in cool, soft shadows. She was like a mermaid, white and green with gleaming, tide-waved hair.

With a smile at this thought, David placed the smart little hat carefully in the rack and sat down, rather unfortunately, upon Rosme's inevitable companion, a box of chocolates.

"Don't worry," she told him kindly, "they are all hard centres. Dr. Holtby says that hard centres are less injurious than creams. Doesn't it sound exactly like him?"

David admitted that it did.

Rosme sighed. "Everytime I visit Frances," she declared, "I find a new reason for never getting married. This time it's chocolates."

"Why?" asked David curiously.

"Because if my husband didn't like them he'd be sure to be unpleasant about it, and if he did like them I should have to give him half."

"Shame!" He said it with such vigour that they both laughed. The sense of good comradeship which a shared laugh always brings descended comfortably upon them.

"But week-ends in Milhampton do me lots of good," admitted Rosme. "I get ideas. I'm going back this time with a perfectly splendid idea for Ramsey's Weatherproof Roofing. Do you find anything in Weatherproof Roofing to appeal to you?"

David admitted that contemplation of weatherproof roofing left him moderately calm.

"Well, when you read my advertisement, it won't. You will want to go right out and build a house just for the pleasure of roofing it with R. W. R."

"Do you like it—writing Ads?" diffidently.

"Much better than teaching school. And with the advantage of not having my services dispensed with. I'm secretary for Lot Bros. advertising specialists.

"Lot Brothers?" David wrinkled his brow. "I've heard of them somewhere. Oh, I know. I've heard Herr Stumpf speak of them."

Rosme's long eyes opened.

"Do you know Herr Stumpf?"

"Only to meet him in a business way. He heard that I had a little—er—device to sell. He offered to put it on the market."

Rosme nodded. "I recognise Herr Stumpf. And did you let him?"

"No. It was only a trifle, not worth bothering about."

"But there are other things—of more importance?"

David blushed. "I hope that may be," he admitted.

Rosme looked thoughtful. "What did you think of Herr Stumpf?" she asked.

"Why—I don't believe I thought of him at all."

"I recognise him there also, and I should say that the sooner you begin to think about him the better."

This was amusing. David had a very good opinion of his own perspicacity and he saw no reason why he should begin to think of any one who had impressed him as little as had Herr Stumpf.

"I have seen other people smile like that about Herr Stumpf," mused Rosme, "but it always ended in one way."

"What way?"

"The way of the Lady of Niger."

David looked blank and then laughed. "Oh, yes, I remember—'The smile on the face of the tiger'—Well, if Herr Stumpf ever makes a meal of me he is welcome to his after-dinner smile. Don't let's waste our time talking about fat little Germans. Let's talk about you."

Now if Rosme had been Clara she would have demurred at this because she would have believed that all men like to talk about themselves.

Being just Rosme she didn't care what men liked to talk about; so settling down with a contented sigh she began.

So interested were they both that they did not notice how the speed of the train slackened and it took the long crunch of the brakes and the jolt of stoppage to awaken them to an intelligent interest in their surroundings.

"Cedarvale!" shouted the brakesman letting in a blast of icy air.

"We don't stop here, do we?" asked David impatiently.

"No, we don't. But we are."

"But only locals stop here usually."

They tried to peer out of the window but could see little save the reflection of their own faces. It was probably Cedarvale but it might just as well have been the North Pole. Hoarse voices shouted somewhere, swinging lights passed to and fro. Between the car windows and the light above the station door drifted a sheet of shifting white.

No one showed the least intention of alighting at Cedarvale. Every one wished whoever was alighting would hurry up. One man a few seats in front of David and Rosme positively fumed at the delay. He was a small man stockily built with the unmistakable air (and clothes) of a farmer. Every two moments he pulled a large gold watch from his vest pocket, snapped it open, looked at it, snapped it shut and fidgeted.

"Seems in a hurry!" whispered Rosme.

The red-faced man, as if he had caught the whisper, turned, and fixed David with a nervous blue eye.

"Have you the time, sir?"

David consulted his modest timepiece.

"I am exactly six o'clock," he said.

"Then we're three-quarters of an hour late already—and now they are stopping here. It's disgraceful!"

David and Rosme agreed as to the disgrace but looked so happy over it that the impatient one turned his injured gaze elsewhere.

"I should like to know," he demanded of a train hand who, lantern in hand, was hurrying through the car, "if I am to be kept here all night?"

"Not by me, you ain't," declared that person whose own spirit seemed to need soothing. "I'm not a man to keep any party against their will. But this here train is going to stay right here till it goes again."

If the red-faced man could have become redder he would most certainly have done so but, as he was already crimson, he swelled instead.

"Just move along, do!" entreated the train-hand. "If I stands here till I melts you'll have a flood as well as a blizzard."

"Are we really stuck?" asked Rosme with awed delight.

"Not us, lady, but the snowplough is. She's stuck tight as a trivet down in Johnston's Cut. Looks as if she'd take considerable time to pull out."

"But I've got to go on, I've *got* to!" stuttered the red-faced man. "I'm going to be married at eight o'clock."

A cheerful grin endowed the face of the train-hand with a pleasing humanity.

"Not you!" he rejoined consolingly. "Don't you worry. You're going to be let off easy this time. Only don't you go for to be so rash again. 'Cause it's a life sentence if you get caught!"

Further comfort on the part of this humourist was cut short by the appearance of the conductor. The farmer, almost apoplectic by now, fell upon him at once, demanding reassurance in tones which became constantly shriller and more wild. The conductor, in quite the proper official way, knew absolutely nothing. They might proceed at once. They might be detained. There appeared to be some trouble farther down the line. His mien said more clearly than his words that it was vain to vex his lofty mind with questions.

But the unlucky groom, now desperate, barred his way with further protests and the passengers, gathered in a delighted and appreciative group, aided as chorus.

"Ah, have a heart! Get the poor man there in time for his wedding," urged a drummer from across the isle.

"Oh, conductor, think of the poor bride!" trilled a maiden-lady from the seat further down.

"Think of all the good cats getting spoiled!" grinned a school boy.

"A deferred wedding is *so* unlucky," murmured a pretty young thing with almost painful sympathy.

"If you will kindly allow me to pass——" The politeness of the official tone was more freezing than the blizzard—"Thank you!" With calm unimpaired the high Olympian departed.

David touched the wretched bridegroom on the arm. "If I know anything about Johnston's Cut," he said, "we're likely to have a long wait. Better telegraph."

The stranded one had forgotten the telegraph! His eyes lost something of their wildness. At least his waiting bride need not dream herself deserted. His first awful picture of a fainting maiden alone before the altar was replaced by the saner one of an irate papa making a few remarks about the management of railroads. "A company which would permit, etc., etc.!" He became more calm and, after an interval of constructive pencil-chewing, produced a message which every one agreed was tenderly appropriate.

"Stuck in the snow—forget-me-not!"

David undertook to convey this to the station operator and when he and the telegraph clerk had recovered from their unmannerly merriment, he made inquiries on his own account about the possibilities of dinner, or supper—anything.

"There's the Station Hotel just across the road," the clerk told him. "You can get supper there if the train stays long enough. Tell you what to do—just watch the High Panjandrum. If he goes over, you're safe to follow. Train can't start without His Nibs."

This advice David passed on to the rest of the hungry passengers and then with Rosme waited until he saw the dark form of the conductor disappearing supperwards. With a laugh and a jest they hurried after him.

What is a blizzard to youth, anyway? I doubt if either Rosme or David would have exchanged their own particular blizzard for any zephyr that ever blew. They had embarked upon a big adventure, an adventure of the spirit, which if it had a name might be called the High Adventure of Being Together.

To the end of their lives these two had only to shut their eyes to live that supper over again. Through them, immortality descended upon that little, dingy village hotel. Long after its walls were debris and its very memory was fading before a successor of pressed brick and balconies, it existed still, unchanged, on that other plane where thought is builder. Even its smell, that strange compound of beer, bad whisky and stale cigars lingered hauntingly down the years. David and Rosme at will opened its door, walked through its passage and sat at its table. They felt, beneath their fingers, its thin, stiff tablecloth which would surely have fallen into pieces had the starch been taken out; they made futile grabs after their board-like table napkins which persisted in slipping to the floor. They helped themselves to pepper and salt and mustard from a sort of plated merry-go-round in the centre of the table and laughed at the pictures on the wall.

The conductor was immortal, too, for he was there at a table by himself eating his meal with official dignity and despatch. They wished he wouldn't eat so fast, or that his large capacity were even larger. They wished that the clock on the sideboard where the water glasses stood, would not insist upon reminding him that time was flying. They sat close together and laughed about everything.

"Roastbeefbrowngravymuttonchopsorfish?" inquired an immortal waitress, briskly.

"Yes, thank you," said David.

"The same for me," said Rosme.

And they laughed at that!

Neither of them were sure afterwards what the brisk one brought them. But Rosme had a vague idea that pie followed it while David always contended that the pie was a pudding. It furnished a nice point for argument.

All too soon the hungry conductor ceased to hunger. He glanced at the clock on the sideboard, pushed back his chair and hurried off. The passengers, whether at the meat or the pie stage, hurried after him. David and Rosme rose reluctantly. Rosme, who did not mind any one knowing of her fine appetite, finished a last spoonful standing, and then they too went out of the station hotel, unknowing that they bore forever its astral semblance with them.

The blizzard had moderated a little but the car had grown decidedly colder. The passengers, disinclined for conversation, sat huddled up in the corners of their seats. Rosme turned up the collar of her coat and pulled her little round hat with the fur close about her ears. She looked charming that way.

She and David were both a little silent. They did not laugh so often. David put his arm along the back of the seat to ward off the draught. Rosme kept her eyes turned away.

Intermittently they talked. They ate all the chocolates. But still the train did not move. The car grew colder. Passengers began to yawn.

The unlucky bridegroom, now long past his wedding hour, went to sleep, and sleeping, snored. No one pitied the waiting bride quite so much after that.

Presently David made a remark and received no answer. Rosme's half-averted face had slipped back against the red plush of the draught-defended seat. He could see the long lashes lying close against her cheek. Some tendrils of her gold-bronze hair lay like threads of fire across his sleeve.

Rosme was very sound asleep. She was unusually tired, for little John had insisted on sleeping with Aunt Rosme for the last two nights of her stay and little John had a cough. One could see weariness in the droop of the curving lips and the shadows under her white skin.

David sat very still. Only once in a while he glanced at her sleeping face, afraid lest his gaze disturb her. A wistfulness dawned and grew upon his own. In those long moments his opening life with all it offered turned to dust and ashes in his mouth. "What shall it profit a man——?" What indeed, if his dearer soul be stolen from his keeping?

The train moved on at last, shrieking defiance at the lessening storm, but Rosme was lost in dreams, and David in realisation.

IV

AFTER his Christmas holiday David settled down to work with a stubborn determination which argued well for results. Rosme found it difficult to settle down at all. The difference in their states may be explained by remembering that Rosme lived in expectation while David had ceased to expect anything. Rosme expected that David would call. David knew that he wouldn't.

Clara had returned to town and was boarding with Carrie Brown. She looked thinner and wore at times a strained expression which David attributed to grief for her mother. It made his manner kinder than ever, so kind that often she bit her red lips to keep from slapping him. David's courtesy bored her indescribably. And she was very much worried about Willard.

Willard, she knew, was gambling recklessly. It amused him to tell her of some of his wildest escapades; a confidence which Clara took as a compliment but which was, in fact, the exact opposite. His failing interest in the girl had revived a little on hearing that her engagement to David had become actual. He considered that she had "brought it off" very neatly, and Clara had been right in thinking that her independence of him pricked his pride. But at the best it was a pin-prick only, and the strained look grew in Clara's eyes as a mocking one grew in his. She had not even the pursuit of David to occupy her now, the slim ring with the flashing diamond (chosen by herself) had written a very satisfactory, if dull, finis to that.

David had very soon told John Baird of his engagement. He made the announcement without comment one night after a few days of specially brilliant work. John had met it with a silence grimly non-committal. "I told you so," was one of the few unpleasant remarks to which he was not addicted.

"You'll not be thinking of marriage for a long time yet?" he asked sourly.

David said that nothing had been decided.

For an instant the keen, old eyes peered into the young, troubled ones.

"Don't hurry it!" said John Baird, turning away.

David passed quickly to another subject.

"John," he said, "my dreams have been growing lately but not my purse. I'm just realising that our working future in Milhampton is going to be a very costly affair. I could do with some more money."

"You can have it."

"From you?" David's eyes began to twinkle. "But you're forgetting the terms of our agreement. If you repudiate your share of our joint work, I can't allow you to have a share in the expense of experimenting. I thought that was clear."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I had considered the selling of our new engine, retaining the right to use it for our own experiments, of course."

"Sell it!" It was not so much a question as an exclamation.

"Why not? The engine is only a small part of what we want to do. It may be years before we are ready with our perfected aeroplane. Why should we hide our discovery away all those years? Why not let it out into the world to be used? It will not injure us in any way. We can use it in our model if we wish or we may get something even better. The fact that other people are using it is nothing to us. Even should we hoard it for ourselves it is probable that by the time we are ready to fly some one else will have made one as good or better. This is not an age when one can lay inventions away for years and expect to find them still novel.

"It is your engine!" The inventor was smoking furiously.

"On the other hand," went on David, paying no attention, "if we sell for a good sum, we have lost nothing and gained enough money to go ahead and hang the expense."

"It is your engine!" said John, stubbornly.

They said nothing more for a while. David sat upon the edge of the table and whistled. John continued to smoke like a small volcano.

"You don't like the idea?" asked David politely.

"The engine is yours!"

"Three times and out! Yes the engine is mine, since it's got to have an owner of some kind, but aren't you acting rather like a sulky child, John?"

"I'll have nothing to do with it."

"No, but couldn't you have something to say about it?"

"I have nothing to say."

"You have, but you're afraid to say it. For one thing you would have to admit the justice of my arguments and the reasonableness of my position. My scheme is quite feasible, too. I have already been approached with regard to selling by a man who is confident that he can place the sale to great advantage."

"Who?"

"Name of Stumpf—Herr Herman E. Stumpf—here is his card."

John Baird stopped smoking suddenly. He stared at the card but made no motion to take it.

"A German!"

"Yes, very much so. A pleasant, fat little fellow; seems to know his business."

John Baird swallowed hard. He was swallowing his pride—always a large mouthful.

When he spoke again his voice was entirely different. It had lost its harshness, its finality. Except that the thing seemed absurd, David would have thought that it sounded like the voice of one who pleads. There was a look in his eyes, too, now that the smoke had cleared away, which David had never thought to see there.

"David," he said in this oddly changed voice, "you wouldn't really sell the little engine to a German?"

"If you object, certainly not. It's your engine as well as mine."

"It's not my engine, but you wouldn't sell it, David—to a German?"

But David was determined to have this out.

"Yes, I would," he said, "if you do not object why not? if he is a responsible man?"

The inventor swallowed again.

"I do object," he said. The effort was so great that David was generously sorry he had made him say it.

"Then that's settled!" he hurriedly assured him. "No engine for Herr Herman E. Stumpf! I suppose you don't care to tell me why?"

The inventor had recovered himself and was looking particularly sour.

"Sometimes I think you're just a fool, David."

"You leave me hopeful that there may be times when you don't."

"What do you think, you thickhead, that this Herr Stumpf wants your little engine for?"

"The firm he represents——"

"He wants it because he has heard in some way that it's an engine particularly adapted to a new type of aeroplane. It combines light weight with great lifting power. It may be, probably is, at this moment the very best engine in the world for this particular purpose. Herr Stumpf, pleasant, fat, little fellow, wants it because his government wants it, and his government, pleasant, fat, little government, wants it because it has a business in view which needs the best and the latest and the most efficient. The business is war."

"I might have guessed you'd say that!" murmured David resignedly.

Baird did not miss the murmur.

"You are thinking I am back on my old hobby," he remarked with a grim smile. "Well, I don't object. If ever a man is going to have a chance for the last laugh, I am that man. And even you must admit that I have done something to prove my belief in my own theories—giving in at my age to a whipper-snapper like you! But even if I lose more than my pride, these brain-pickers shan't have the little 'Greig.' Haven't I watched them for years? Don't I know that not an invention comes into the market which may be useful along war lines that they do not secure it if possible? Much of what they get proves worthless, but they take the bad with the good and we and other fools laugh at them, call them pleasant, fat, little persons and sell them whatever they want!"

"But if I were to offer the 'Greig' to our government they wouldn't take it. I'd offer it like a shot if there were a chance."

"Our government is not preparing for war."

David digested this thoughtfully.

"Well," he said with a smile, "for a man who wants the whole race blown to smithereens, entirely for its own good, it occurs to me that you are mightly finicky about who does the blowing!"

John's brows drew together in a mighty frown but David had long ceased to fear this exhibition. He waited smilingly, for his answer.

"Strictly speaking," said John, "that is to say in theory, it makes no difference. But in practice, my lad, in practice, if you want a thing well done, do it yourself. And you can tell that to your fat, little friend, Herr Stumpf."

V

WHEN David got home he wrote at once to Herr Stumpf.

"Dear Herr Stumpf," the letter said, *"I have been thinking over your kind proposition with regard to putting the 'Greig' on the market but upon consideration have decided to go no further in the matter. Thanking you, I am faithfully yours, D. Greig."*

Having written the letter the next thing was to post it and David was much annoyed to find that he did not have Mr. Stumpf's address. There was no address upon the card the little man had given him, which for the first time struck David as strange. Nor so far as he could remember, had Stumpf ever mentioned any place where he might be found.

David knitted his brow and considered. He did not want to delay the matter until he saw Stumpf, since, after the decided stand Baird had taken, the sooner the offer was definitely declined the better.

Whom did he know who knew Stumpf? Instantly his mind flashed back to a lighted car and a girl's voice saying with interest, "Do you know Herr Stumpf?"—Miss Selwyn of course! She knew Stumpf. He was a frequent caller at the advertising agency. All that David had to do was to call there, too.

All? He knew by the painful leap of his heart how much that "all" was. He had not seen Rosme since the night of the blizzard, now more than three months ago. He had played the game as he saw it. But could he be accused of assisting the fates in the matter of not having Herr Stumpf's address? Hardly! It was his plain duty to get that letter to its destination as soon as possible. And he knew of no other way.

His blood began to slip more lightly through his veins, the air grew suddenly electric, life began to move again. He blessed John Baird and his crazy theories; he blessed the engine; he blessed Herr Stumpf!

He wondered if he possessed a decent tie? He wished to goodness he had bought a new spring suit! The distance between now and to-morrow morning seemed incalculable. At dinner he was markedly silent and displayed small appetite. Miss Walker wondered if there could have been a lover's quarrel.

"I've asked you three times if you'll have this piece of cake," said Silly Billy Fish, "and now I'm going to eat it myself—see me? What's on to-night? Going over to Park Street?" (Park Street was the abode of Miss Sims.)

David shook his head.

"Come along with me then. I'm going to see a girl—peach, believe me! Pleased to see any friend of mine, anytime."

"Sorry to deny her the pleasure, Billy, but I'm busy."

"Park Street jealous?" with a knowing wink. "Don't stand for it, my son. Do a little jealousy yourself. Trot out Willard and see what happens."

"Willard?" blankly.

"Goes there quite a lot, doesn't he?"

"Very seldom I believe. Don't be quite an ass, Billy."

"Try a little yourself, old stiff! Now this girl——"

David hurriedly excused himself and went out for a walk. He didn't want to listen to Billy's chatter about girls. Silly, Silly Billy with all his real experiences yet to come! There had been times lately when he had envied Billy. But not to-night! He was going to see Rosme in the morning.

Had Rosme known of this state of mind on David's part it would have given her great satisfaction. But how could she guess? During the three months which had intervened since that wonderful night in the snow-delayed train, Rosme had reached the point of refusing to consider David at all. He had not thought fit to continue their acquaintance? Very well! Rosme held her shining head very proudly erect. If she was hurt, no one knew it. No one, that is, save Madam Rameses and what Madam knew was never spoken of. If she longed to ask questions she repressed the longing with noble fortitude.

Not so the Infant. In a weak moment, on the day after the return from Milhampton, Rosme in the gladness of her heart had told the Infant that a very nice young man was coming to call, perhaps to-morrow. The Infant had a tenacious memory and her daily inquiries concerning the non-arrival of the nice young man were little less than maddening.

"Is this morning To-morrow?" she would say, pattering in on her tiny bare feet.

"No, this to to-day."

"Will the nice young man come to-day?"

The answers to this ranged all the way from the first smiling "perhaps" to, "perhaps not," "I don't know," "I don't think so" and "no." It had been "no" for a long time now. But even yet the Infant pursued the illusive "To-morrow."

As for the only other member of the household, Maggie, the Irish maid, she had nice young men of her own.

"Two, I have, Miss Rosme, and divil a bit to choose between them. It's unlucky I am for if I take the wan I'll be wishing at wance that I'd taken the other."

"Shut your eyes and chance it!" advised Rosme.

But Maggie was doubtful of the wisdom of this.

"Well, you can't marry them both," said Rosme with finality.

Maggie sighed, "not with the good word of the priest," she admitted. "Sure it's little the priests know about marriage and all."

"I think," declared Rosme with a note of bitterness in her newly discovered wisdom, "that a woman is very foolish to marry at all."

Maggie agreed to this. "But wouldn't she be terrible foolish not to!" she added with true Irish logic.

Rosme decided that she herself would never marry. It was much better to be independent. A successful business woman is a happy person and Rosme intended to be very successful. Things were booming at the office and the Lot Brothers, noticing an indefinable change in her manner, raised her salary in a panic. It is pleasant to have one's salary raised. Rosme assured herself almost every day that she was very happy.

On this particular morning Rosme got down to work early and, as David in his eagerness was early too, they almost ran into each other at the office door. The unexpectedness of the meeting gave her no chance for any feeling of self-consciousness and she was able to say "How do you do?" in the flat and automatic manner common to people who greet mere acquaintances. So perfectly did she do it, that David was conscious of a shock. Hitherto, whenever they had met, Rosme had been her frank and friendly self; now, that self might never have existed for all the evidence she gave of it.

"I am a little ahead of time this morning," said she, unlocking the door. "I am afraid neither Mr. Lot nor Mr. Joseph Lot are down yet. Which of the firm did you wish to see?"

"I—why, I don't know, I'm sure."

David was finding the surprise of this new Miss Selwyn almost overpowering, for, in that fine, casual manner which men have, it had not occurred to him that Rosme would change. In considering his own problem he overlooked her's altogether. Indeed it had not dawned upon him that she might have a problem. Now, with paralysing suddenness, he caught a glimpse of himself through her eyes. The glimpse was not flattering, a trifler, a man to whom friendship meant nothing!——

Rosme was unpinning her hat and waiting for a more sensible answer to her question. It was a pretty hat, small and trig and covering her hair so closely that when she removed it one was conscious of great satisfaction.

Patting a few wandering tendrils into place, with what she hoped was a businesslike touch, she proceeded to uncover her typewriter, and in doing so became politely aware that David was still standing.

"Oh, do sit down!" she urged hospitably. "One or other of the firm is certain to be in directly."

David felt himself descend into an immense depression. But his nervousness vanished. One can't be nervous with a girl who is hardly aware of one's existence.

"I didn't come to see the firm," he announced briefly.

"No?" Pure surprise this, nothing more.

"I came," blundered David, "to see if I could find Herr Stumpf."

It was Rosme's heart which sank now—he hadn't come to see her, after all! But David noticed nothing in her face save half-amused interest.

"Herr Stumpf is to meet you here?"

"I had better explain," stiffly. "I have a letter for him, rather important, and I find that I have not his address. I remembered that you spoke of him. I thought that perhaps you might know it."

"Why, of course. I'll get it for you in a moment."

With the most obliging, but unflattering, haste Rosme crossed the room to a small cabinet and began leafing over a card-index.

David watched her from the depths of his great depression. So this was the end of his coveted meeting—she was not going to talk to him at all! In another second she would have found the address; a moment or two she might spend in typing it for him. Then he must say "Thank you" and go away. It would be all over.

"That's strange!" said Rosme's voice musingly. She had gone through all the cards with the ease of long practice. "Herr Stumpf's address doesn't seem to be here at all." She rummaged rapidly through a drawer of loose visiting cards and picked up one. "Here is his card, but there is no address on that either. It looks," she said smiling, "as if our friend had no human habitation whatever. He probably disappears at night. I shouldn't be surprised."

"You don't like him, do you?" asked David remembering part of their conversation in the train.

Rosme shrugged. "No I don't like him."

"Because he is a German?"

"Why, no," in surprise. "It isn't a crime to be a German, is it?"

"Of course not. Only I was speaking to a man last night who seems to think we ought to dislike Germans on principle."

Rosme laughed. "And all other foreigners, I suppose. It's a very British attitude of mind, isn't it? Although if all Germans were like our fat friend I wouldn't blame him. That man gets on my nerves.

He makes me creep. I hope——" Rosme intended to say that she hoped David was not having anything to do with Stumpf but remembered in time that she was not at all interested in anything David did.

And as she hesitated, Mr. Joseph Lot came in. Mr. Lot, being presented, was pleased to meet Mr. Greig. Was there anything he could do for him? Something in the specialty line? No?

David intimated that his desire was to get a letter to Herr Stumpf.

Mr. Lot was gracious. He would be delighted to serve his friend Stumpf in any way. Herr Stumpf was usually to be found at the King Edward. Had Mr. Greig never attended one of his delightful supper parties? No? Herr Stumpf was extremely hospitable, so open-handed, so free! Mr. Lot beamed with satisfaction over the open-handed freedom of Herr Stumpf. However if Mr. Greig was anxious to reach Herr Stumpf without loss of time he might leave his letter in his, Mr. Lot's, care.

It happened most fortunately that Herr Stumpf had spoken of calling in that very morning on business concerning—er—a client of the firm. If Mr. Greig would intrust his letter to Mr. Lot, Mr. Lot would be only too delighted—certainly!

With a sigh David produced the letter. His business was concluded. There was no shadow of an excuse for remaining longer. In his bitter disappointment he cast on Rosme a glance which unwittingly told her more than an hour of conversation would have done. It told her so much that her heart, already a traitor anyway, relented.

"If you are coming back this way at noon," she suggested casually, "you might drop in to make sure that Mr. Stumpf has called."

"Or if you were to telephone to his hotel"—began Mr. Lot.

"Oh,—I never telephone!" stammered David. "That is, I am coming right past the door, it will be much simpler to look in. Thank you so very much." He retired in good order, blushing furiously.

"Never telephones!" exclaimed Mr. Joseph in simple wonder. "The young man must be mad!"

"Perhaps he is afraid of germs," said Rosme dimpling.

As, in the morning, David had met Rosme just going into the office, so at noon he met her just coming out.

"It's all right," she said, "Herr Stumpf has your letter. And he didn't like it at all."

"Didn't he? What did he say?"

"It was the things he didn't say that mattered. He looked so particularly bland and smiling that I knew he must be swearing frantically inside."

They walked on together—why not, since they both happened to be going in the same direction? Every one seemed to be out walking with some one else to-day. Even here on narrow, busy Yonge Street, spring was in the air. The April sun shone hot upon the pavement. The windows were gay with all the gaiety of a new season. Flower stores overflowed. There was a scent of violets. David saw that Rosme wore a fragrant bunch of them tucked in her belt. Had some one given her violets? Very probably.

Rosme noticed the glance at the violets and we may be sure she did not miss the sigh which accompanied it. This young man puzzled her. If he did not like the idea of violets in her belt, if he were as appreciative of her company as he seemed to be, why had he so consistently denied himself the pleasure? Frances had said that she could positively deny any rumour of an engagement, so it couldn't be that. It might be simply that he was too busy. The cool edge of her morning manner began to wear away and when, after walking as far as he could reasonably expect her to walk, he timidly suggested lunch, she agreed with a faint shadow of her old friendliness.

"Only we'll have to have it right here," she said, "for it's half-past twelve already."

"Here," was a cosy little place around a corner and up some stairs, an inn, well and favourably known to people in a hurry. The room they entered was almost full and from a certain atmosphere of chatter and perfume David was very much afraid that most of its occupants were women. He felt very shy. He was glad that their table was in a corner. So perturbed was he that the dishes on the menu confused themselves in a most extraordinary way.

"Are you a vegetarian, Mr. Greig?" asked Rosme when she had listened with wonder to his order.

"Rather not!"

"But—you have ordered only cabbage and onions."

David, in deep embarrassment, revised his choice. Rosme's cheek dimpled.

"Don't you like it here?" she asked. "Don't you think it's more comfy than the bigger lunch-rooms?"

"Yes, very much so. I mean, I think it must be—when one gets the habit. But tell me now, on your honour, is there another man in the room? I'm afraid to look."

Rosme laughed. "Poor thing! But cheer up. There are no less than four of your own sex to support you—able-bodied creatures too. And over there by the archway is a special friend of yours, Murray Willard. He doesn't look at all frightened."

"Willard here? Oh, then, I'm safe enough. In an emergency one could always count on old Willard. But I didn't know that you knew him?"

"I don't know him, exactly. But I have met him and I often see him about with Herr Stumpf."

"I didn't know that Herr Stumpf knew him either."

"Oh, Herr Stumpf knows lots of young men. They are a speciality of his. Is your friend an inventor by any chance?"

"He has a nice fancy in the arrangement of ties."

"Then Herr Stumpf must be interested in neckwear. For he evidently finds Mr. Willard useful."

"But I can see no reason——"

"You wouldn't. Herr Stumpf's reasons are not visible to the naked eye."

David smiled. "You make him out a kind of ogre making meals of youth. Fee, fi, fo, fum! Like that.

"Just like that, exactly."

"Then if he tries to make a mouthful of Willard, I can see him suffering from indigestion. Murray knows his way about."

"Even then he would be no match for an ogre," persisted Rosme. "And that would be too bad, for Mr. Willard is so very good-looking. Don't you think so? His companion is handsome, too. And she is looking at you."

"Is she? It makes me wish I had eyes in the back of my head."

"Be patient! You'll see her presently for they will pass us going out. Or perhaps a description will do—for you know her, I think. She is tall and dark, quite striking. She wears a large black lace hat."

At the mention of the hat David looked up with sudden intentness.

"I saw her speak to you once—at the station," pursued

Rosme with a mischievous gurgle. "Now, who is she? —give you three guesses."

"One is enough. The lady you describe must be Miss Sims."

Rosme wrinkled her exceedingly pretty nose but whether at Miss Sims or at his recognition of her David couldn't tell. Her eyes remained fixed on the two at the other table.

"They're coming now," she murmured.

David half rose expecting that Clara might stop to speak to him. But Willard seemed in a hurry and the two passed out with only a smile and gesture of greeting.

"They make a handsome couple," said Rosme. "Is she engaged to him?" The carelessness with which she added the query was almost too perfect.

There was a slight, a very slight pause and then "No. She is engaged to me," said David.

"To you? How ripping! And how stupid of me not to guess. But somehow I had the idea that your fiancée's name was Millar?"

This was well done of Rosme. Her gaze was limpid and her voice warmly sincere.

"You know about it then?" asked David heavily.

"Why of course!" It was a gallant fib. Rosme, after a second of sickening shock, had rallied her forces and run up her flag. If she were hit no one would guess it—he least of all.

David, looking at her gloomily, saw nothing save the pleasant excitement of a girl who hears some interesting news about another. She had known of his engagement all the time and had not cared enough to remember his fiancée's name!

"Aren't you going to drink your coffee?" asked Rosme, with the admonitory kindness of one who makes all allowances for a man in love.

David raised his cup absently.

"Careful! It may be hot."

"No such luck!" He set down the cup still untasted. "But—you needn't go yet, need you?"

"As a poor slave of industry, I'm afraid I must. It is five minutes to one."

They made their way out of the now crowded lunchroom into the sunny, blowy street where spring kept holiday. But something had changed it while they had been away. They were no longer a part of the happy carnival. They stood outside its magic, looking on.

"Are you wondering if I got the news from Milhampton?" asked Rosme teasingly (brave little hypocrite). "I didn't. I don't think it has reached there yet. Very wise of you! When I marry I don't intend to let my dear home town know anything about it for ages."

"Why?" the question was mechanical.

"You've lived there—you ought to know!"

But David made no effort to follow this up. His silence irritated her unreasonably. Why didn't he play up? What did he mean by staring ahead with miserable grey eyes? He wasn't a child! He had asked the girl to marry him, hadn't he? Well then—let him look as if he liked it!

Many things like this Rosme said in her sore heart but her lips smiled, her cheek dimpled. In the game of "pretend" Rosme, with pride to help her, was past-mistress.

David walked back as far as the office. Once he ventured to ask if he might buy her some violets. But she shook her head.

"I have some already, you see," she said, allowing her hand to stray caressingly to the flowers in her belt.

She did not add that she had bought them herself.

VI

ROSME had made no mistake about the effect of David's letter upon Herr Stumpf. It annoyed him exceedingly. He had anticipated no trouble with young Greig and the brief though courteous refusal was correspondingly provoking. Beneath his breath Herr Stumpf indulged in words of great vigor and many letters. He almost forgot his customary smile until he looked and saw Miss Selwyn's eyes upon him.

"He iss a frient of yours, this Mr. David Greig—so?" he asked, beaming upon her in his fatherly manner.

"Yes," said Rosme briefly.

Herr Stumpf shook his head and permitted himself a benevolent sigh.

"These young men," he said, "they are so voolish! It iss sad to see von make the gread mistake. But whad can von do?"

"Nothing," said Rosme.

Herr Stumpf shrugged with kindly despair and turned away.

"Oh, Herr Stumpf!" called Rosme remembering. "So many people inquire for you here. It might be a convenience if you were to leave your address."

The smile become positively beatific.

"My address? I am charmt, my dear young lady. Id iss unfortunate that at presend I haf—vat you say—no name, no number! Nodins but a hotel. For one so unsettled id iss most gonvenient. At the King Edward vill find me always. You are most kind."

Herr Stumpf's car was waiting at the door. It was a cheap-looking car, not very clean. But it had cost a sum which would have seemed a joke to one who had no experience of its quality. Herr Stumpf's car, like its owner, did not advertise its value upon its surface. Also Herr Stumpf was a good mechanic and always made his own repairs.

He drove now, carefully and without undue haste to a handsome house upon a certain avenue. Both house and avenue were well-known in the city and the name of the owner of the house was not German whatever his appearance might be. Herr Stumpf did not enter at the front door but was admitted modestly through a door at the side which led, by a small hall, directly into the private library of the owner of the house. Here he was met by that gentleman himself, a tall, handsome man of middle age and military bearing. At present he sat before a desk carefully bare of papers.

His profile being sharply outlined against the window showed rather too plainly the flatness of the back head and the thickness of the neck which were the only unprepossessing things about him.

The two men, so different in appearance and apparently so different in station, met as friends and equals.

"Well, Stumpf?"

Herr Stumpf selected a cigar and lowered himself into the easiest chair.

"It is not well," he grunted discontentedly.

"You didn't get it?"

Stumpf proffered David's letter without comment.

"What happened?" asked the other briefly.

"I don't know yet."

Herr Stumpf, having no further use for his careful English spoke quickly and in German: "What I want to know is—the real importance of the matter?"

The other tapped the desk impatiently.

"I thought you knew that! It is of the first importance. If the engine does what you say is claimed for it, it is exactly what we want for Wedderdorf's new plane. We've got to have it. You say he is an honest young man?"

"As the day!" Stumpf's smile was perilously like a sneer. "I think we can take it for granted that what he claims for it is true. Besides young Willard, from whom I got the tip in the first place, has heard the two of them, old John Baird and this Greig, talking it over and he says Baird has pronounced it good. You know what that means."

"Yes, if old Baird is anything like as clever as they say."

"He is a genius. I would gladly give all of our appropriations for a good many years to get at some of his secrets. But that's impossible. He keeps a poor lock on his safe—because there's nothing there."

"He keeps no record of his discoveries?"

"None that would be of use without his brain behind them. Or, if he does, no one has yet found where he keeps them."

"Well—this engine is the matter at the moment. This Willard is a friend of Greig; how about working through him?"

"I intend that, if we decide to take up the matter in earnest. I have Willard pretty well where I want him. I have been most obliging in regard to his unfortunate losses and a considerable amount of his paper is in my pocket at this moment. Being a gambler myself I have much sympathy for his weakness for a stiff game."

The other nodded, yet frowned. "That is very well," he said, "but the hold is not strong enough for any serious matter. A debt of honour?—Ach, it is not enough!"

"It is a great deal to these young men. They have foolish notions. But there is more." He took from his pocket-book a slip of paper and held it for the other man to see.

"Forged?"

Stumpf nodded. "His uncle's name, you see? Very well done, too. I have kept this for some little time. He thinks it cashed and all danger over. His uncle, it appears, is criminally careless about money matters. He is quite in the habit of writing his nephew cheques, and forgetting about them. The young man thinks he is quite secure. But he was very nervous for awhile and has never repeated his—experiment."

"Good! You have something tangible to go on. Ask him to procure for us the Greig engine. Offer him a commission in the usual way. No more may be necessary. Do not let him get the idea at first that we are overly anxious. If that method fails, we can try others."

They smoked in silence for a few moments. Then; "have you any late news?" enquired Stumpf diffidently.

"Yesterday. But there is nothing new. We are ready—that is all we know."

"I grow impatient."

"We all do. But not more impatient than those who will give the word. The moment will come."

"It may be years!"

"It may be. That is not our affair. But I think not, friend Stumpf, I think not. This Zabern affair has been ominous. We will not wait too long."

"You think it will be England?"

"Impossible to say—at present. Eventually, of course."

The fat man sighed. "I do not seem to care so much about the others," he said dismally.

His companion frowned. "It is a matter of expediency. Every one understands that. There may have to be another beginning. The way may have to be smoothed. Then England—and the freedom of the Seas! and then——" he made a large gesture with his hand towards the South.

Both men laughed.

"It is really funny," said Stumpf more cheerfully, "that they don't see it coming."

"They see nothing. Their eyes are weighed down by dollars. Only last week I read in one of their popular papers an article upon their fleet. As a humorous effort it was colossal! And the people believe it. The thought of that long coast line with its fair cities never disturbs their dreams!"

"May they dream long and deep!" said Herr Stumpf.

"Deep, but not long," laughed the other. He filled two glasses. "Here's to it!"

"The Day!" responded Stumpf. They clinked and drank.

"I think," said Stumpf dreamily after a pause, "that when things are settled down again I would as soon live here as anywhere. I like Canada. And it will not be unpleasant to have a little something to say here, eh?" He laughed softly. "They need a little discipline, these Canadians!"

"Quite so," dryly. "But we have a long way to go before that. In the meantime——"

"You are right. In the meantime there is work to do. I go to get the young man's engine."

He heaved himself out of the chair but before he reached the door the other stopped him for a final word.

"Listen!" he said, "you understand of course that in any case and *whatever happens* we, you and I and our associates, must not be implicated. We have much work to do here yet. Endeavour to use this Willard without arousing his suspicions but if before the affair is ended he does suspect—if by the high bribe you have to offer or in any other way he becomes informed of any of our purposes—well, at present I look to you to see that this does not happen! We must be left to work undisturbed."

"I quite understand." Herr Stumpf's smile for once had vanished. He looked very thoughtful. "I shall be careful," he added as he opened the door.

It was noon by this time and Herr Stumpf was hungry. He took his little car out to lunch and spent the afternoon busily about his various occupations. At eight o'clock he dined with a lady friend and later on in the evening, he presented himself, happy and smiling, at a certain house in a quiet street, where one is admitted freely, if one is known!

Here he was pained to find his young friend, Murray Willard, playing poker.

"I thought id vas your indendion to take a vacation from this so delideful game," he said tapping him paternally upon the shoulder.

Murray shook off the hand.

"Oh, go to—— Oh, it's you, Stumpf!" with an effort to be cordial, "vacation be hanged, I am in luck to-night!"

"That is goot," purred the German. "That is very goot. Then I shall your revenge gife you, a liddle later—so?"

"Rather a good sort, old Stumpf," said Willard as the little man passed on, "lectures me like a father on my evil ways."

"But wins your good money just the same, eh?" asked his partner, laughing.

"With my rotten luck he can hardly help it. But he's been decent. His winnings seem to actually pain him sometimes.

"Wish I could feel hurt in the same place!"

If winning pained him, then poor Herr Stumpf must have suffered greatly later in the evening when in endeavouring to give Willard his revenge he was unfortunate enough to win from his young friend rather heavily.

"Of all the rotten luck!" said Murray throwing down his cards. "Stumpf, I'm cleaned out! Even as it is I don't believe I'll be able to manage all that's coming to you to-night."

"Do not let that disdurb you, my dear Willard. I do not worry mineself. A debt of honour mit you—bah! I say no more!"

"It's quite all right, of course," said Murray, flushing hotly.

The two left the table and proceeded to refresh themselves.

"I haf a ledder from your young frient, Greig, today," said Herr Stumpf. "He iss not wise, that young man! He refuses my so eggcellent offer."

"Does he?" Willard's tone was indifferent.

"I am surbrised," declared Herr Stumpf with more emphasis, "surbrised and disabbointed."

"Why?" listlessly. "I thought it was mostly for his sake that you were going to handle the thing at all. You said so."

"That is true, in a measure. Id iss an admirable obbortunity for your frient. But also nod a bad thing for me. I vill be frank. I vill hide nodding. The firm I rebresent vill be glad to obtain your frient's engine."

"Oh—I see."

"If you can of assisdance be," Herr Stumpf saw that the time for plain speaking had come, "my firm will not object, I am sure, to paying you the usual gomission."

"The usual commission?"

"On a dransaction like this there is a gomission to the go-between, always. Id iss a pisness obbortunity I offer you."

Willard fingered his glass, thoughtfully.

"I know something about the values of these things," he said. "Tell me roughly what it is that you offer Greig."

With businesslike clearness Herr Stumpf explained the offer.

"It sounds fair enough," agreed Willard.

"It is fair, my frient. Id iss a little more than fair. Id iss bedder than he could bossibly get elsewhere. He himself will admid it."

"What is the commission?"

Herr Stumpf extracted with some trouble a bulky pocket book from his waistcoat pocket. From it he produced certain bits of paper.

"These," he said quietly.

Willard went a trifle pale. Herr Stumpf had been so very decent of late that Murray had almost forgotten how many of these bits of paper he held.

"I thought," he said, "that your firm paid the commission, not you."

"That iss so. They will pay me. I will return your I. O. U.'s. We shall both benefid."

"I see."

Murray thought indeed that he did see. Herr Stumpf was working for his own hand after all. He wanted, naturally enough, to have those promises to pay redeemed. He knew that the giver of them had no money. Therefore he thoughtfully put in that person's way an opportunity of earning some. It seemed quite honest and above board—as if he were a creditor garnisheeing wages. A good head for business had Herr Stumpf!

"I don't blame you for wishing to secure yourself," went on Willard coldly. "I shall be glad to pay you in this way if possible. I will do my best to make Greig see the good points of your proposition."

"That iss right! And do not think me endirely selfish, my young frient. I know, too vell, how these debts of honour drouble the sensidive mind! And now that you haf your way to freedom so blain before you, vat do you say to another hand? The night is yed young and the luck may ghange!"

VII

WILLARD soon found out that the effort of turning an honest penny as middleman was no easy job. David proved unexpectedly obdurate. He did not argue. He admitted everything which Willard said in regard to the advantages of the bargain. He admitted that he had no personal objection to selling, but was pleasantly immovable in his determination not to sell.

"I hate to see you make a fool of yourself, David," declared Willard, "and I believe that's what you're doing. I perceive the fine Italian hand of mine Uncle! I rather thought you would have a broadening effect on the old boy but apparently it has been the opposite. You'll soon be as narrow as he is."

"With your kindly warning in view I shall endeavour to avoid it."

Willard knew that further argument was useless, but for obvious reasons, he did not betray this knowledge to Stumpf. To that gentleman he reported progress as slow but encouraging.

"You can't rush old David," he told Stumpf. "He's a slow mover. And of course it is my uncle who is influencing him in this. What I have to do is to get around that influence; it will take time!"

"To a liddle time I do not objecd," Herr Stumpf assured him heartily. "But why should your amiable uncle so voolish be?"

"My uncle is not amiable," grinned Willard, "and he happens to dislike Germans."

Herr Stumpf's exclamation of pained surprise was little less than pathetic.

"Ach! He does not understand us, your poor uncle," he said forgivingly. "It iss sometimes so."

"Exactly. But don't lose any sleep over it. Wait a bit until David feels the need of more money. He's putting a lot into that place at Milhampton. He wants to do things in a big way."

"That iss goot! Id iss fine that the young should be ambitious. Id iss most inderesting, all that you tell me of your frient's plans."

"There isn't much to tell for he says very little about them. I gather, though, that the aeroplane will be his line. He thinks we are within touching distance of something commercially usable."

"Gommercially usable? So? Id iss most fitting that the young Canadians should think of gommerce. That is also goot!"

"Oh, David isn't the money-grabbing sort. It is the means he thinks of, not the end."

"So? He is a dreamer, your frient? It is goot that the world is full of dreamers."

Willard was languidly amused at the warmth of feeling in the voice of the little fat man."

"You, I suppose, never dream," he remarked condescendingly.

Herr Stumpf sighed. "Ach no," he murmured, "Id iss bleasant to dream but id iss safer to keeb awake. I vill exbect news of your sugcess soon."

"Oh, he'll come round," Willard assured him confidently.

This was, of course, mere time-saving on Willard's part. He had given up all hope of influencing David, but he was full of that other hope which springs eternal in the gambler's breast—the hope for a change of luck which would square everything. Willard was "in" very deeply with Stumpf. Nor was Stumpf his only creditor. There were others not so obliging. Should the little German turn nasty Murray would be in a very unpleasant position indeed. Once before he had helped himself out of a smaller difficulty than this by the unauthorised use of his uncle's name. But that had happened when he was well under the influence of liquor and the resulting fright had quite cured him of any desire for a repetition. Nothing had ever been heard of that forged cheque. Murray had gambled on John's notorious carelessness in money matters and he had won—or so he thought. But he would never take that risk again. He felt rather sick even now when he thought of it.

Had Willard known it, there was more truth in his statement to Stumpf than he thought. David did need ready money and often wished himself free to dispose of the engine. He had begun to realise that his responsibilities as an engaged man were of a very practical order. Clara had begun to talk of marriage.

As the weeks went by and the weather slipped from spring to summer it grew plain that something should be settled. Clara grew thinner and began to droop. She felt the heat, she said, and the long days in the store seemed never ending. In the evenings when David took her on the water for coolness, she leaned listlessly against her cushions in the stern of the boat, trailing her hands in the darkening water. She had little to say and for that very reason was better company. David, seeing her sitting there with her white face, dark hair and trailing hand, could again build around her an atmosphere of romance which helped to soothe his restlessness. He told himself that she was really as fine as she was beautiful and that some day when she was his wife and they understood each other better—but some trivial remark in her increasingly fretful voice always brought him back to the dull reality.

Clara was having her own hard time and a hastened marriage seemed the most sensible way out of it. (Clara still tried to be sensible!) Her affair with Willard appeared to be at a standstill and what little pride she had left urged her to let him see that, if she could not have him, she could still leave him. Besides, she had begun to be afraid for David.

Ever since the day when she had seen him lunching with Rosme, Clara had known that there was danger. True, he had shown no signs of withdrawal but her sense of perfect security was gone. With lightning intuition she had seen at once that this girl with the delicate pointed face, the little rings of bright hair under the close hat, the neat blue suit so instinct with style without being "stylish"—this girl was David's kind.

She hated her for it, naturally! She saw in Rosme the air, the manner, the clothes which she herself fiercely knew to be desirable but which she had never been able to do more than imitate. Rosme had, perfectly and without effort, that grace of breeding which Clara with all her trying could never attain.

"Well, she shan't have David, anyway!" Clara set her white teeth on the consoling thought and slipped a soft, possessive hand through his arm.

Cousin Mattie had at last been told of the engagement. David had done it beautifully—in a letter. But Cousin Mattie, whose faith in letters was not great, had come down to Toronto to see for herself. She came prepared to be pleased, determined to be pleasant. But a day or so with David and a little of Clara's company made her very thoughtful. It wasn't that she didn't like Clara. The girl had been very sweet to her and Miss Mattie was almost pathetically eager to appreciate her sweetness.

She was most generous, too, in praise of Clara's beauty and never permitted herself to notice anything in her manner which might not be quite perfect.

"For," she told herself sternly, "if David wanted to marry an angel, you know you would think that heavenly manners might be improved."

Still in her heart she knew that David was not happy. It wasn't a case of Clara's faults. David had plenty of faults of his own. It was something deeper than this; a lack of sympathy, a separateness of soul so patent to Miss Mattie's discerning love that she was bewildered with its tragic possibilities. How had David made this great mistake?

It says much for Miss Mattie's guilelessness that she never was able to answer this question.

"You will bring your bride home to the old house, Davy?" she asked him when they spoke of his future plans.

"Not if it means your leaving it!" he retorted promptly, guessing her intention.

"No bride likes a third in her home, Davy. It isn't kind and it isn't wise."

"Very well then, we will have to go elsewhere but you will stay in your own home. And that's settled."

"But my dear——"

He laughed and kissed her protest from her lips. "Not in a thousand years and not for a thousand brides!" he whispered. And Miss Mattie, much as she loved him for his loyalty to her, was uneasily conscious that this was not the attitude of an infatuated lover.

She had intended staying in the city for a fortnight but David was not altogether surprised when she decided to return home sooner. She had heard from the neighbour who was taking care of Alice, the blue cat. that this precious animal was showing symptoms of fits.

Anxiety over this calamity proved an excellent excuse but the real reason was that Miss Mattie feared a failure of her celebrated tact. If she stayed, David might guess the perturbed state of her mind, thus adding to his present perplexities. Her strong common sense told her that in this vital matter she could do nothing to help. David must follow his own course, uncounselled.

"The idea of Alice having fits is absurd," she told David. "No one understands Alice but myself. She is the most sensitive cat I have ever known. I hope you won't mind, Davy dear, if I feel I ought to go."

David said that he didn't mind. He appeared to be quite taken in by the desperate case of Alice. But the dull ache in his heart showed that Miss Mattie's tact had failed for once. Harsh reality was clearing David's sight. He foresaw many such subterfuges in the future.

"There is just one thing which worries me in leaving sooner than I intended," said Miss Mattie, "and that is a little commission which I shall now be unable to perform. I promised Mrs. Holtby, the doctor's wife, you know, that I would look up her young cousin, Rosme Selwyn; that nice girl you remember whom you met at Christmas? Mrs. Holtbly is not at all satisfied with her boarding-place. She boards with a—a spiritualist," Miss Mattie's tone grew mysteriously lower, "and, of course, it is very worrying. I offered to go and find out just exactly how everything is, but if I return to-night I shan't be able to. So I am going to ask you, Davy dear, to do it for me. Mrs. Holtby will be even more satisfied with your report than she would be with mine. She thinks you very sensible."

Were the fates really having their little joke with him, David wondered. In vain he tried to think of a reasonable excuse for refusing Miss Mattie's request. He pleaded that he was very busy and also that he knew Miss Selwyn so slightly that calling upon her might seem an impertinence. In reply to the former, Miss Mattie said he worked too hard anyway and needed a little recreation; in regard to the latter she was inclined to wax indignant. To her fond mind it would not have been an impertinence for David to drop in upon the Queen. Besides, if David would not do it then she must stay and do it herself. She had promised Mrs. Holtby.

It seemed unnecessarily churlish to refuse longer. David said that he would go—and immediately he had said it he was glad. To see her again was a torture which he courted. It could at least hurt no one but himself.

VIII

ROSME had been beguiled into promising a story at bedtime and sat at the open window of the nursery waiting for the Infant who was still splashing in her bath. As she waited, she read again certain portions of a letter from Frances:

"I hope you won't be vexed, Rosme," Frances wrote, "but I felt I must either come myself or send somebody to *see.* You are so young and may easily be deceived by a *designing woman.*" (Frances always underlined copiously.) "Last week I read a terrible exposé of Spiritualism in a magazine and I have felt quite *unnerved* ever since. You say Madam Rameses is giving it up, but are you *sure?* Is her repentance *sincere?* Miss Greig, who has been in Toronto for a week, intended coming to see you but she had to come home before she managed to do so. But she has asked her cousin, David Greig, to drop in some evening just to *satisfy my mind.* He is such a sensible young man and engaged also, so it will be quite all right. Miss Greig says the fiancée is charming. Such a handsome girl—but I fancy she *didn't like her* just the same. But as she may come down here for a visit soon we shall be able to judge for ourselves.

"About bringing the little girl, Lucie, here for a holiday this summer—if you think it will do her *good* I can scarcely refuse. That is, if you are quite convinced that it is wise as regards Bella and Paula and John. Naturally, they come *first.* In love and anxiety, dear Rosme.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"FRANCES."

Rosme smiled a little impatiently over this letter. Why were dear, kind people so often fussy? And how blind most people, kind and unkind, were. To send David Greig of all people! Would he come? One moment Rosme thought he would, the next she felt sure he wouldn't. And when she felt he wouldn't she felt disappointed. And when she felt disappointed she felt angry. What did she care about David Greig? Nothing. Nothing at all!

"Is you crying, Rosme?" asked the Infant whose bare feet had approached unheard.

"Of course not!"

"Your eyes look all bubbly. Will you tell me my story now? Will it be a new one?"

"I'm afraid you've heard them all, Infant."

"Just a tweeny, weeny new one!"

Rosme considered.

"There's a very short one I heard once when I was a little girl," she said musingly. "A little boy told it to me. It's about a Prince."

"I like Princes."

"That's exactly what I said!" with a little laugh of reminiscence. "Well, once there was a Prince who lived in a castle on a hill——"

"Did it have a name?"

"I think it was called the Castle of Youth! It was a charming place, with balconies and a beautiful view. One day the Prince was out on a balcony looking at the view and he saw, in a garden on another hill, a Princess playing ball. She had beautiful, golden—no, beautiful *red* hair, and the Prince thought he would like to play with her. So he started off. But first he had to cross a valley. There was a wood in the valley and the morning mists hung over it. But it was pleasant there and the Prince didn't know that it was a magic wood full of spells, so he didn't hurry. He thought he had plenty of time. But when he came to the far edge of the trees and the mist lifted so that he could see the Princess playing ball he found that he couldn't go to her because——"

"Because?" repeated the Infant impatiently as Rosme paused.

"Because he couldn't. He was a prisoner."

"Did he want to go to the Princess?"

"I—I'm not sure."

"But in a story you have to know what people want. Did she want him to come?"

"Yes—no, certainly not. She had her ball to play with."

"It isn't much fun to play ball alone," said the Infant wisely. "I expect she wanted him quite badly. Why didn't she stop playing and run down and help him out?"

"She couldn't do that."

"Then she was just stupid." The Infant quickly lost interest in stupid people. "I don't think I like that story," she added yawning. "There's no sense to it."

"Not a bit of sense," agreed Rosme. "I'll think of something better to-morrow night. Now let me tuck you in, because I hear Maggie talking to some one. She may want me."

Maggie's voice was indeed distinctly audible although Maggie herself was no nearer than the front hall. To Rosme, trained in interpretation, its tones indicated surprise and some indignation. Maggie was always indignant with visitors. Another voice, much lower, though distinctly masculine in tenor, answered her and then Maggie's step, heavy with importance, could be heard upon the stairs.

"Miss Rosme!" Maggie's best whisper was several times more piercing than her ordinary tones. "Will you be coming down, please? There's a young man to see you and where to put him I don't know for Madam's having a *seants* in the parlour."

Instantly the Infant, that child of excellent memory, rose from the soft confinement of her tucked-in covers:

"Oh Rosme!" she cried, "perhaps it's To-morrow—perhaps the nice young man has come at last!"

"Be quiet, Infant!—Very well, Maggie. I'm coming. Show the gentleman into the dining-room."

"Oh, you're all red!" The Infant fairly bounced with excitement. "Rosme, if it's him will you bring him up to see me? I've got on my best nightie—oh do."

"It's probably the man to fix the sewing machine," said Rosme practically. It wasn't a very likely supposition but it was the best she could think of at the moment. Her own mind was in a whirl. If the caller were indeed David he had lost no time in obeying his Aunt's injunction. And if he had obeyed so quickly it looked as if he had been glad to come. And if he had been glad to come——

Well, now that he was here, it wouldn't hurt him to wait a moment!

Rosme tucked the Infant in again, leisurely. Then she carefully smoothed away her dimple which had peeped out from nowhere and brushed her hair which did not need brushing. Then very demurely she went down stairs.

"Oh, it is you, Mr. Greig!" she said when she saw him in the dining-room.

David, rising, admitted his identity.

"I thought it was probably the sewing machine man," said Rosme with an inflexion which might have been one of regret. "He's been promising to come for ages."

"Haven't they an eight-hour day in the sewing machine union?" asked David smiling. His nervousness had left him when he saw that, for all her coolness, she was as nervous as he.

Rosme ignored the smile and the question of union labour with raised brows.

"I'm sorry that Madam is engaged," she said. "But we make it a rule never to interrupt a sitting."

"Certainly not!" said David hastily. He wondered whether he would say that the seeing of Madam was immaterial or let the convenient supposition pass. "Perhaps I can wait?" he suggested. This appeared to meet all requirements.

"Oh yes, I suppose so," Rosme seemed slightly surprised. "I mean if you can spare the time. But in that case it will be pleasanter to sit in the back garden. We call it a garden because it grows an apple-tree—a perfectly good one, too, as long as you don't eat the apples."

David rose with alacrity. To sit under an apple-tree, even a bitter apple-tree, in a back garden transcended his brightest hopes.

"You can then," went on Rosme, "view the house from the outside back elevation. The front is doubtless already familiar to you, and the side is not visible owing to the proximity of the house next door. My cousin is very fond of detail so you may add that we have grass but no flowers and that the hose leaks badly in several places. But the apple-tree is a decided asset. You may label that Exhibit I."

David felt his ungovernable blush surge up and overwhelm him. She knew, then! Some one had told her why he had come! She looked upon him as an interfering meddler! An insufferable cad!

"How did you know?" He asked it so miserably, and so crimson was his blush and so sincere his confusion that Rosme forgave him on the spot.

"Well, you see, I had a letter. It told me that you were appointed inspector of boarding houses pro tem. Very well. I shall be rather glad to soothe the souls of my relatives. All I ask is the privilege of dictating the inspector's report."

"That's usual, isn't it? At any rate, it's the least I can do. Coming at all was infernal cheek, I see that."

"Oh, I don't mind! You see, Frances has the idea that Madam is a desperate person, known to the police, a dealer in black magic and socially impossible—the latter count being much the worst. It will be your cheerful task to dispel these illusions. So I shall endeavour to aid and abet your inquiries in every way. There is Maggie, for instance. How did Maggie strike you?"

David permitted himself a reminiscent grin. "She didn't—thank heaven! But for a moment I thought she was going to. Does she object to your having callers on principle or didn't she like my face?"

"Principle, I think. You may mark Maggie Exhibit 2. Frances will appreciate Maggie. The only other members of the household are the Infant and Madam. Madam, of course, is the most important. That is why you decided to wait, I suppose."

"I—oh yes, certainly. I mean I'm very glad to wait. I suppose," hopefully, "these sittings take a long time?"

"Oh, no. There are only three to-night."

"Three spirits?"

"Three seekers. You will be a fourth."

"I? But I am not a seeker."

"Oh, yes, you are. You'll have to be. How else can you investigate properly? Besides, this will be your last chance. Madam is giving up her circles entirely."

"May I put that down in my report as due to your reforming influence?"

"Well—it would make a hit with Frances! It all depends upon how you feel about telling fibs? As a matter of fact it was the Infant who was the influence. Madam has wanted to retire for a long time but it was the Infant who finally decided her. She has never wanted the child to come into touch with her profession and something happened the other day which made her realise that Lucie has already begun to notice."

Leaning back in her chair under the apple tree, she told him the story.

"The Infant, you see, had a doll. She has never seemed to care much for dolls, but, with the Infant, you never know. This doll, whom she called Agatha Pearl, was apparently much more of a person than we suspected, for when she died suddenly of a broken head the Infant was inconsolable. She has never been very strong since she had the scarlet fever and her grief over the doll really frightened us. Then suddenly she appeared before her grandmother and demanded that she 'bring back' the spirit of Agatha Pearl. She wanted to tell her that she hadn't meant to break her head!

"'Without realising in the least what it meant to the child, we told her that Agatha Pearl was only a doll and that dolls with broken heads were—just smashed dolls.

"You should have seen the tragic way the little thing pointed to the poor, maimed doll. 'Is that all of her?' she said, 'hasn't she got another face that isn't broke?' We didn't know what to say or how to pacify her. And then a curious thing happened. Madam's hand (she writes automatically, you know), got a 'message' and for once it was surprisingly to the point, *'Tell Lucie the real doll lives in her mind. If she closes her eyes she will see it quite plainly.'* "

"By jove!" said David, startled.

"Yes, wasn't it clever? And the odd part of it is that Madam herself would never have thought of that answer—not in a thousand years."

"And what happened?"

"The prescription worked beautifully. The Infant shut her eyes tight. 'Oh, I see her—I see her!' she cried. 'And she isn't broke!' She was perfectly satisfied and went to sleep happy."

"Does Madam often get messages like that?"

"Very seldom. Most of them are silly twaddle. Some have no sense at all."

"Then how does she know what to depend upon?"

Rosme laughed. "She doesn't! That's the trouble. The poor dear is terribly confused about it all. It's funny, but rather pathetic, too."

"I've been looking it up a bit," said David with a slightly self-conscious air. "It seems the best psychologists ascribe such phenomena, when genuine, to the working of a submerged mind, a sort of second self."

"U-um! Well, all I can say is that the two selves show no family resemblance, and if Madam has a submerged mind it certainly never comes up to breathe. But you can judge for yourself presently for here comes Maggie to say that the coast is clear."

They rose reluctantly. To both of them it seemed that they had had but a moment. Yet in that moment the narrow city garden had become a landmark on their road of dreams. Many times afterwards was Rosme to sit alone on the bench beneath the bitter apple tree thinking, "He did this," and "He did that," while David, debarred from even this privilege, haunted it in memory, a young and most unhappy ghost.

Madam was waiting for them in the parlour. Her sturdy figure in its neat and gentlemanly costume was seated stiffly in a high backed chair. David was guilty of a perceptible start. His preconceived idea of her which had been very vivid, combined a thin and nervous transparency of person, with a long nose and a general tendency toward sloppiness. Her square face, the down upon her lip, and the grey bobbed hair were revelations. So also, in a different way, were the kindly power of her eyes and her delightful voice.

"This is Mr. Greig, Madam," said Rosme, "you have heard me speak of him."

"Yes, my dear," Madam's hand closed over David's and her penetrating glance searched his face.

"Mr. Greig would like to consult you," said Rosme demurely.

Madam glanced from one to the other with a questioning smile.

"Would you?" she asked with a directness quite in keeping with her appearance.

"The gentleman will now say 'I would,'" prompted Rosme, sotto voce.

"Rosme is a sceptic," said Madam, placidly. "And no doubt you are a sceptic, too, Mr. Greig. But I do not find that the attitude of the inquirer has much to do with the results. One of the last circle was a most fervent believer yet she obtained nothing," Madam sighed. "I did so hate to disappoint her!" she said with a simplicity which David liked.

"Try for us, Madam, won't you?" asked Rosme, "or rather for Mr. Greig. Nothing special, but just to see if a message will come? I have been telling him about the automatic writing and he is so interested."

Madam brightened. "I will try," she said. "Indeed, I feel in a receptive mood to-night. Rosme dear, will you play a little? Music helps," she explained, turning to David, "I don't understand why."

Rosme went obediently to the piano. It was almost dark in that corner of the room. David could just see the light blur of her face as it bent over the keys. The adventure began to seem fantastic and unreal. Yet the simple sincerity of Madam and her entire absence of pose kept it from becoming absurd.

There was no special preparation. Madam, brisk and tailor-made, merely deserted the high-backed chair in favour of a larger and more comfortable one pushed close to the small centre table on which stood the lighted reading lamp. There were some sheets of paper on the table and a pencil. Madam leaned back in her chair, took the pencil loosely in her hand and closed her eyes. There was no sound in the room save Rosme's quiet music. David had never heard her play before and was soon lost in a new delight, for Rosme played well. He almost forgot about Madam until a sudden stirring from her chair attracted his attention. Madam's eyes were still closed. Her head leaned heavily against the cushion of the chair. She seemed in profound sleep but her hand which rested on the table was awake and writing rapidly.

It was this—the utter detachment of the hand—which struck David as most curious. It wrote, he said afterwards, not as the hand of a person, but as a person itself. The observer's first startled thought was not "she is writing," but "who is writing?" For the time being the hand had absolutely ceased to be part of Madam Rameses—it had broken away!

Rosme ceased playing and whirled round on the music stool. She, too, was watching the writing with fascinated eyes.

"See how purposeful it is!" she said.

But even as David nodded, the purpose seemed to be slowly withdrawing from the writing hand. The movement slowed, the grasp on the pencil grew slack, the pencil wavered drunkenly, slipped from the loosened hold, and rolled upon the floor. Once again the hand was the hand of Madam Rameses.

"Don't disturb her!" warned Rosme, "she will rouse presently."

"Is she quite unconscious?"

"I don't know. Sometimes she is only partially so. Sometimes she is not unconscious at all. She is waking now."

The psychic indeed had stirred in her chair. Nervous tremors ran through her. Her face twitched sharply once or twice, then her eyes opened. They were blank at first but only as an awakening sleeper's eyes are blank. Almost at once she sat up and smiled at the two young faces watching her.

"Did we get anything?" she asked quite eagerly.

Together they bent over the table and David was aware of an odd thrill of disappointment—what he saw seemed but a series of disconnected words in an execrable script, impossible to read. He was surprised to hear both Madam and Rosme utter a low exclamation of satisfaction.

"Why, there is nothing readable at all!" said David.

"Oh yes, there is," cried Rosme. "You aren't used to the script. These wiggles in between the words do not mean anything, nor does that bit at the beginning. See—it starts here! The first word is 'Hate'—how strange!—look, Madam!"

Together the girl and the woman spelled out the message.

"Hate — is — a — poor — thing — David — remember — when — hate — is — near — you!"

"What does it mean?" asked Rosme in a low tone. "It must mean something."

Madam, who had been studying the script intently, now looked up. "It is a genuine message," she said in some excitement. "I mean it is one of those messages with which I have absolutely nothing to do. Sometimes

I am not sure of them—they seem half familiar, as if I had dreamed them. But there are others that are quite apart from any consciousness of mine. This is one of them."

"How can you tell?" asked David doubtfully.

"By peculiarities of the script. The messages which I may unconsciously compose myself are very much better written. They never contain those curious attempts at words which are scattered through the genuine ones, nor do they waste themselves in false starts as this one does. But for all that, it may mean nothing. Sometimes they don't."

"It doesn't seem to be anything startling, anyway, although it does make sense," said Rosme in a disappointed voice.

But David, looking thoroughly puzzled, took the message and studied it carefully. Word for word he compared it with his own excellent memory.

"It's very odd!" he said at last. "As you say, the sentence seems to have no present meaning or application but it's strange for all that. The words comprise a warning given me by my foster father just before he died. It is the same, I think, word for word. I can hear him saying it now. The subject of hate was very much on his mind at the time."

Rosme's disappointment changed magically at this. But Madam looked worried and a little frightened.

"And you think that—that your father wrote it?" she asked almost timidly.

"No, I don't think that. I think that the words must have made a deeper impression on me than I knew. They were probably lying dormant, but well imbedded, in my mind and your mind must have found them there. It's very wonderful."

At this sincere tribute to her powers Madam cheered up also but next moment she sighed again.

"I wish I knew just what it really is," she said restlessly. "Sometimes I seem to satisfy other people but I never satisfy myself. It will be a relief to give it all up. Perhaps if I had never meddled with it I might have been happy."

"You are happy now," smiled Rosme, slipping a young arm around her waist.

Madam's kind eyes smiled back absently. "Yes, yes," she said, "as long as I have you."

David was conscious of a strong liking for her as she said it.

"You look tired," he said impulsively. "We shouldn't have asked you to sit again."

"Oh that! It is nothing. A night's sleep and I am quite rested."

Nevertheless she did, to David's unaccustomed eyes, look strangely exhausted and he hurried his leave-taking in consequence.

He and Rosme went out together into the dimly lighted hall. They were both rather silent. David lifted his hat from the rack where Maggie had placed it.

"I suppose I must go," he said.

"I suppose you must," said Rosme.

They looked at each other and in their eyes there grew a hurt amazement at the unnecessary cruelty of things.

"I'll make a good report—you'll see," said David lamely.

"With a successful séance as 'Exhibit 3,'" added Rosme. But the sparkle had gone out of her voice. It sounded dull and flat.

They shook hands hastily and said good-night.

"Rosme dear," said Madam from the parlour, "I like your young man very much."

IX

HERR STUMPF was very tired of waiting on Murray Willard, also he had a cold in his head which did not improve either his temper or his English. As he drew his young friend aside for a moment's private conversation his smile was distinctly less pronounced than usual.

"If somedings is not done at once in the matter of your affair," he told Willard with misleading blandness, "I shall bresently much trouble haf mit my suberiors."

"Too bad!" agreed Murray insolently.

A spark of red seemed to glow in the depths of Herr Stumpf's small, shifting eyes. He laid a fat finger on his young friend's shoulder.

"Id iss indeed too bad—for you, young man, and do not forged id. I haf most patient been. I vill vait no longer."

Murray was just excited enough to be reckless. He shook off the fat finger.

"Then you might as well know the truth," he said with careless directness. "I've done all I can. Greig won't sell his engine. It can't be bought."

"Id can't be bought! You say that to me? Mine frient, you do not your position abbreciate. I would ask you to nodice this." He held a slip of paper toward the slightly fuddled Willard who waved it away with a lordly air.

"Sorry Stumpf, can't settle with you to-day. Make a fuss if you want to. Guess I can stand it. Gentlemen don't press notes of honour when a chap is broke."

"This," said Stumpf with a certain cold quietness which arrested the other's wandering attention, "this iss nod a note of honour."

"What the deuce is it, then?" Murray made a snatch at the paper but his kind friend held it well beyond his reach.

"Id iss a note of—dishonour," said Herr Stumpf, resuming his smile. "You may see id but you may nod touch."

Murray looked. His fresh complexion faded to a sickly white. Also he became completely sober on the instant.

"I see that you gomprehend," said Herr Stumpf with satisfaction. "I haf here a free pass to the bennitentiary. Iss it not so?"

Murray said nothing.

"The so eggcellent uncle's signature, you berceive, iss nod in the hand of the so eggcellent uncle."

Still Murray was silent. He felt as one in the paralysing grip of a horrible nightmare.

"Cheer up!" the little German slapped him heartily on the shoulders. "You vill now broceed to obdain the invention we require—is it not?"

"I can't," murmured his victim hoarsely, "I have tried everything."

"You will try some more things."

"There is nothing more."

"There is still the lady."

"What lady?" in real astonishment.

"The young lady of Mr. David Greig. The lady with the so beautiful dark eyes which you, his frient, are so amiable to enderdain for him."

Murray was fast recovering from his first shock. He was a resourceful young man and now that he knew the worst he was already braced to meet it. His old insolence of manner returned.

"Well, what do you know about that!" he exclaimed.

Herr Stumpf, whose knowledge of current slang was not profound, took this as a request for information.

"I know a gread deal," he said, smiling his blandest. "I even habben to know which lofer the lady vavours. Id iss not Mr. David Greig! Now subbose you say to him, 'sell the goot Herr Stumpf your liddle engine and I no more will make bretentions to the lady'—what then?"

Murray was sufficiently recovered to laugh and laugh he did, so heartily that his tormentor stared in amazement.

"You're a wonder, Stumpf!" said Willard. "You are positively a marvel made in Germany! Things you see and the things you think you see are stupendous. So you have been observing Miss Clara, have you, and you think that her happy fiancé would give his eye-teeth, otherwise his pet invention, to be rid of a hated rival? Why man, I tell you——"

Suddenly it occurred to Willard that he needn't tell Herr Stumpf anything. He might keep a little useful information to himself. A plan, a really brilliant plan, had been born in his fertile brain. True, Herr Stumpf's idea was grotesquely wide of the mark. David was not pining for more of Clara's society but—was it not very possible that he was pining for less of it? Supposing he offered David freedom? Great idea! How fortunate that he had always kept his hold on Clara. Here was the chance of a lifetime—to do old David a kind act, to give the pretty Clara a rattling good time, and to kill forever that nightmare which had suddenly come alive—to get out of Stumpf's fat clutches, to be free once more!

"Vat is it you smile at?" asked the German suspiciously.

"Same thing that you do, Stumpf, my own sweet thoughts. Say, there may be something in that idea of yours—with variations. I'll try it."

"You are wise?" said Herr Stumpf darkly.

"Of course you are entirely wrong about that signature, Stumpf. My uncle will acknowledge it at any time. As for the other things, you can't risk showing me up. Get you in bad with too many fellows. Scare off your birds, see? You wouldn't gain anything but the dislike of decent people. Still, to keep all pleasant, I'll try again as King Somebody-or-other did when bitten by a spider. Now that I look at you, Stumpf, you are a little spidery."

Stumpf was puzzled. He had expected the young man to grovel and he hadn't groveled. He had expected him to plead for mercy and he had called him a spider. Well, there was no understanding these verdampt English anyway! If this one did what he was required to do, that was the main thing.

"I care not *that* for the obinion of your decent beobles!" he said, snapping his finger. "I vant vat I vant and I ged it, if not, I ged the person who disabboints me!"

"Quite so. Really, Stumpf, your English grows worse and worse!" Murray's tone was bored. With a languid "good-night," he smiled insolently into the German's beady eyes. But when he was alone his affectation of indifference fled. He was up against real danger and he knew it. Still, there was excitement in the game and there were still some cards to play. Murray was too good a gambler to call a game lost before the last trick was turned. With a growing feeling that all might be still to the good, he went to see David.

David was at home. So was Mr. William Carter Fish. Indeed so much at home was Mr. Fish that it was only with great persistence and by tactics far removed from the subtle that Willard was able to convey to him a suspicion that his company was undesirable.

"I say, do you chaps want me out of this?" asked Billy after the first half hour. His tone of hurt innocence would have melted any one save Willard with an end in view.

"Not at all, Billy," said David genially.

"Strange how often David and I disagree," said Willard thoughtfully.

" 'Tisn't your room! You big stiff!"

Willard sighed regretfully.

"Don't mind him, Billy. I know what he wants to talk about. I can see it in his eye. And it would only be wasting my time and his. Nothing doing!"

"Not this time, David, my son. This is something new."

David looked pleasantly incredulous, but Billy, who seldom tried conclusions with Willard, had already raised himself from the easy depths of his chair and was annexing a few extra cigarettes preparatory to departure.

"When it ends in a scrap," he told David gloomily, "you'll need an umpire. Just knock Willard's head three times against the radiator and I'll come along. Or if you like I'll hand out my decision now. Nothing like giving a decision before you get too excited to be reasonable. If all our base ball umpires——"

The door closed gently but firmly upon our base ball umpires.

"How you can stand that chap!" exclaimed Murray.

"I like him," said David with finality, "what's the matter? You look worried."

"Money."

"I can let you have some," said David instantly.

"Thanks. But I don't want to borrow. What I really want is to earn a little."

The idea of Murray earning a little was so novel that David smiled. "Have they offered you a commission on the sale of my engine?" he asked by way of pleasantry.

Murray's instant, "Yes, they have," took him by surprise.

"That's queer," he said after a thoughtful pause.

"I don't see that it's queer. It's a business proposition."

"Well, I'm sorry, Murray. But you know my decision."

"David, it means a lot to me to get this commission. More than you guess. Supposing I could offer you something that you want very badly—not money."

"I don't know what you mean."

Willard flushed a dull red. Now that he had come to the point, it was hard to go on. In his selfish way he cared a great deal for the respect and friendship of David Greig and he knew him well enough to guess that he was hazarding both.

"Suppose," he went on, "that I could offer you freedom—now wait a moment, let me say what I've got to say. Honestly, it's for the happiness of both of us. Plain speech never hurts anybody."

"That's true, but I can't see—well, go on."

"You made a mistake in asking Miss Sims to marry you," said Willard. "I don't know how it happened and it's none of my business. But I know you're miserable and I believe she is. The sensible thing would be for you to break away. But I know you won't do it. You would insist that it is the lady's privilege to end an engagement."

"In the latter respect you interpret me correctly."

"Oh, don't be so stiff. Be human! You know very well that you want to be free but you're too much of a gentleman, and not enough of a man, to say so. But if Clara Sims should ask you to release her—what then?"

"I don't care to discuss the matter."

"David!" Murray could be very winning when he chose. "Don't refuse to listen. You don't need to say anything that you don't want to. But I've got a straight proposition to make. You can be free in a week, in an honourable manner, if you'll only say the word."

"How?" David found it hard to bring out the word, but it came.

"I know a way. It is as much for the girl's happiness as for yours. At present she wants to marry you and she will continue to do so unless I show her a—an alternative which she wants still more. I'll do this, if you'll put me in the way of getting Stumpf's commission."

There was trouble and wonder in David's eyes as he raised them to his friend.

"Murray," he said, "if you can do this and if you believe it is a thing necessary to Clara's happiness and to mine, why do you bargain about it? Why didn't you do it weeks ago?"

It was a straight question, a question based upon friendship as known to the David Greigs of this world. And it hit Willard in a vulnerable spot. His reckless eyes fell before David's troubled ones.

"It can't be money," mused David. "You can have money for the asking. And I won't insult you by thinking that money would buy your friendship, anyway. But there is something driving you, what is it?"

"You are right," sullenly, "I am driven, but I can't tell you anything more. I'm in a worse hole than you are and I want to get out. It's a straight case of something for something. Do we deal?"

"No, we don't. If you were in your sane senses you would see the thing is impossible. But I want to help you if I can. It's John who doesn't want to sell the engine, you've guessed that, haven't you? If selling it means such a serious thing to you, I'll put the matter before him once more as strongly as I can, not mentioning you, of course, and I'll do what he decides. Now you had better go home and go to bed."

"David——"

"If we talk any longer, Murray, we may quarrel."

When Willard had gone, David sat for a long time lost in troubled thought. Nor had all the trouble to do with Murray and his evident predicament. Murray had been in difficulties before and had got out of them. There must be more than one way of arranging his affairs. But what had he meant by the outrageous bargain he had proposed? What did he mean by saying that Clara, too, was unhappy—that there was something which she wanted more than she wanted to be Mrs. David Greig? The idea that there might be such a something did not surprise David. He had never been able quite to "see" Clara as happily settled in Milhampton. Another prospect with more of the spice of life about it might very well appeal to her. But what was the prospect, and by whom could it be offered?

Willard, apparently, knew.

But if this were true, and Clara were really dissatisfied, why could he not himself win an honourable freedom? He knew the answer to this because he had tried that way and found it barred. He remembered every moment of that past interview. It had happened one evening when Clara had been more than usually difficult and discontented. He had taxed her with her discontent and tried, with the utmost delicacy, to find out if their relationship had anything to do with it. The result had been—just nothing! Clara had been surprised, hurt, offended and angry in turns, and had finally collapsed in tears upon his shoulder. He was all she had! She had given up everything for him! What did he mean by talking like that? Thinking horrid things just because she was a little depressed by the heat! It was unkind, it was cruel! More tears followed and David left her with his chain more firmly riveted than ever. He had no desire to repeat the experience.

Yet Murray Willard knew of a way! It was hard, very hard, to put the thought of it from him. It danced like a will-of-the-wisp through his gloomy brooding.

Murray had offered him "something for something," and he had refused Willard's offer. Of course he could have done nothing else. One does not make bargains like that—no—no! David bit his lip and frowned.

But he was very human. Argue as he would, his mind could not get away from the one, sharp fact: Willard had offered him—freedom! How priceless it seemed no one who has not lost it can ever know. It was all of earth and heaven in one word to David and the word was "Rosme." He put the thought away. He dared not think it!

Then he went to find John Baird.

I do not think that David failed in eloquence that day. If words could have moved John, he would surely have been moved. But John had always held words lightly. He let David have his say and then began to talk about the news in the morning's paper.

"But what," asked David in desperation, "has the murder of the Archduke Francis at Sarajevo to do with my wanting to sell the Greig engine?"

"Nothing. But it has a lot to do with the fact that the Greig engine will not be sold."

"You refuse to give me back my promise not to sell?"

"I do."

"You still hold to your foolish dream of war?"

The old man tapped the paper on the table beside him.

"It's not a dream any longer," he said mildly. "The first shot has been already fired from the pistol of Garvio Prinzip at Sarajevo."

X

IT speaks well for David's sweetness of temper that he listened patiently to John's discourse upon the real meaning of the affair at Sarajevo. The tremendous importance of that comparatively trivial crime has been common knowledge for so long that we are apt to forget how few gave a thought to it when it happened. Only a small minority who, like John, had scanned the political sky of Europe for uneasy years could possibly have seen in that flash of an assassin's pistol a portent of a world's catastrophe. And even they were not sure, but only fearful.

When John had finished what he had to say David was silenced if not convinced. He was too level-headed not to realise the manifold dangers which the inventor pointed out and though he was too young to weigh their importance correctly, his own private affairs seemed curiously smaller and less absorbing. Perhaps John noticed the change in his face for he said abruptly, "Now that I've put the case fairly before you, you can take your own responsibility. You are not a boy any longer. I'll give you back your promise. Sell the engine to your little German if you wish; it probably won't make any difference anyway."

"If half that you say is correct, the difference would be only the difference between a decent Briton and a traitor," said David hotly. "Going further in the matter is out of the question until things have cleared up and we are sure you are wrong. In the meantime how about doing some real work? When will you come down to Milhampton and begin?"

"Whenever you're ready."

"That will be soon, then. I'll go now and tell Willard that the deal is off."

"Willard? What has he to do with it?" asked John sharply.

"Nothing much." David was angry with himself for the slip.

"Is Willard mixed up with Stumpf?"

"Only in a business way."

"The worst way of all! The lad is nothing to me. But you might drop him a warning, David."

"I will."

But like most warnings it came too late. Murray scarcely listened to it. He had read refusal in David's face and his whole mind was busy with the possible consequences to himself. To be warned against Stumpf was rather funny, considering his extensive acquaintance with that gentleman's methods. As for David's reasons for his refusal, he found them foolish in the extreme—some rot about war and Germans! For so clever a chap, David was certainly a silly ass!"

"As for this Stumpf," David had added, "I shouldn't be surprised if the fellow were nothing less than a German agent."

"Agent?" murmured Willard. "I can call him lots better names than that."

"I would advise you to have nothing whatever to do with him."

"Thanks. The advice, as advice, is good."

"He is probably laughing at us all as a lot of silly dupes."

"Laughing," said Willard, "is Stumpf's long suit."

"Murray, do you owe him anything? If you do, I wish you'd let me help you out."

"I have already given you that coveted opportunity.

Funny that people never want to help a fellow in a way that really helps."

Murray's tone was light but there was hardness behind the words. Of what use to offer money when money was so useless? Money would not charm that slip of green paper from Herr Stumpf's pocket book. Yet David could have helped him! Something bitter and dark began to grow in Murray's heart. He called it a "sense of justice." But it was really envy, the envy of the threatened for the secure. Murray was beginning to see that it is easier to play the fool than to pay for it.

"If you won't confide in me," said David, "why not go to your uncle?"

Murray laughed. "Or to the devil," he suggested. "Thanks. But perhaps if I go to Herr Stumpf it will do quite as well. Good-bye."

He did not, however, go to Herr Stumpf. On the contrary he might be said to have carefully avoided that gentleman. But the respite at longest could not be long. Herr Stumpf was not easy to avoid. He appeared suddenly one day at his young friend's shoulder.

"Ach," said Herr Stumpf, "it iss delideful to meet you, mine frient! I am most angious for your gompany. Vill you for a liddle ride come?" holding open the door of his inconspicuous car he signed Willard to enter with an air not to be disregarded. "There is a frient whose acquaintance you vill much enjoy to make."

Willard resigned himself with a shrug.

Herr Stumpf, as always, drove the car himself, and it appeared to take all his attention for he said no more until they stopped before the handsome house on —— Avenue which we have visited with him once before.

"This iss the blace," he said briefly, leading the way along a stone paved walk.

"Why don't we go in at the front door?" asked Willard irritably, "we're not tradesmen, are we?"

Herr Stumpf smiled his most seraphic smile. "We are anything which is gonvenient," he said blandly.

Shrugging again, Willard followed him through the side door and into the library.

"I say—this isn't your house, is it?" he asked, looking around with surprise at the large and heavily luxurious room.

"It is the home of a frient, Mr. Smidt."

"Convenient name—Smith!"

Herr Stumpf's calm was unruffled. "Id iss," he assented, "and here iss the gendleman who finds it so. Mr. Smidt, this iss the young man I told you of."

"In the matter of the Greig engine?" Mr. Smith's voice was low and pleasant. Mr. Smith's English was entirely without accent. Mr. Smith was not smiling—which was such a relief from Herr Stumpf that Willard shook his offered hand with something like warmth.

"If you are the head of the firm who wish to buy the Greig engine," he said frankly, "I am afraid it is no use. I have tried every means I or Herr Stumpf can think of and Greig will not sell."

"Do you know why he will not sell?"

"Yes. The engine was partly the invention of my uncle, John Baird, and Greig felt bound to consult him before selling. The old man has some crazy idea about the imminence of war. He has persuaded Greig that it wouldn't be safe to sell his invention to—outside of his own country."

Mr. Smith appeared not to notice the slight hesitation.

"An absurd idea," he said quietly.

Willard nodded.

"Now," continued Mr. Smith, "how do you stand in this affair?"

"That is what I want to tell you. I undertook to do my utmost to get you this invention in return for a commission and the surrender of a note which Mr. Stumpf holds; a note which he thinks if produced, might have —very unpleasant consequences. I have done my very best, but the thing you want is simply not obtainable. So in turn I wish to make a proposition. I suppose you people are not in business for your health, and as things stand I represent a total loss. It won't help you a bit to use that note against me. It won't bring you a cent. But if you will give me back the note, I'll undertake to pay you quite a decent sum on account at once. I know where I can get it, and I'll gradually pay the whole thing off. You'll get back all your money. You won't lose a cent."

Herr Stumpf in the background was heard to sigh impatiently.

"All this is nod to the boint," said he.

Mr. Smith's keen eyes, which had been boring into Willard, now turned themselves on his companion. "I think I had better explain things a little further," he suggested pleasantly. Herr Stumpf gave a fat nod.

"You have the wrong idea entirely, Mr. Willard," said Mr. Smith. "We are not worrying about the money we have spent on you. We do not want it back. There is only one thing we want from you and that is—the Greig engine."

"I have told you——"

"Wait a moment. You will say that everything has been tried. But that is absurd. We have only begun to try. Think! Is it reasonable that a foolish idea of an old man, who I have heard is notoriously eccentric, should be allowed to cause such inconvenience to normal people, to yourself, to the important firm which we represent? What does the failure to get this invention mean to you? Ruin, disgrace? I do not mince words. Herr Stumpf assures me that nothing but the plans of the Greig engine will suffice to restore to you the slip of paper you mention. Let us accept this as a fact or we will get no further. On the other hand we are prepared to raise our offer very considerably."

"What's the use?" broke in Willard. "Don't you suppose I'd try anything under the sun to free myself from that smiling, little, fat devil behind you? But there's nothing more to be done."

Mr. Smith tapped his pencil impatiently. "You are a very dense young man! Why should we raise our offer if we intend you to try the old methods which have already failed? We offer you more because the new methods mean more. They mean risk. Since nothing but plain words reach your intelligence—what you cannot buy, we want you to take."

The words fell into a tense silence. Willard, biting his lip, was trying to tell himself that he hadn't seen this coming. That he was overcome with surprise and disgust. Yet his first words were not an indignant repudiation.

"What good would stolen plans be to you?" he asked, "you couldn't use them?"

For the first time Mr. Smith smiled a very tiny, tight smile.

"That," he said, "is entirely our affair. Once the plans are in our hands your part is done. You will never hear of them again. There will be no trouble. We do not contemplate manufacturing the engine—in Toronto."

"Oh," said Willard thoughtfully.

"Now listen," went on the other. "You ought to be able to get them quite easily, and the gain to you will be enormous. Here is our offer: all back debts wiped out, the return of your incriminating paper, and a sum of money amply sufficient to render life agreeable for a year or so. In short, complete rehabilitation."

"Or a term in prison for attempted theft."

"That," suggested Mr. Smith delicately, "is a possibility in any case."

"I was drunk when I forged that note."

"Yes? That was regrettable."

"But if I do this, I do it with my eyes open. I put myself outside the pale."

"On the contrary. You will be free and rich. You will be more than ever inside the pale, if you succeed."

"Oh, I would succeed all right."

The two Germans exchanged an understanding glance.

"We forget one thing," said Herr Stumpf, silkily, "if by any regredable accident he should not succeed, it would exdreemly unbleasant be for us."

"That is true. We don't want any police court inquiry which might involve the firm."

A feeling of panic seized on Willard. Were they going to withdraw their offer? If they did, he was completely lost. He knew Herr Stumpf by now; there would be no hope of generous forbearance there. But if he went through with this—what was it, anway? David didn't really care for the engine, and as for old John, he owed him no consideration. The abstraction of the plans would hurt no one and he himself would be free and safe!

"You needn't be afraid of a police court inquiry," he said slowly. "Even if I were caught, there wouldn't be that."

"Why not?" the question rang sharply.

"That is my business."

"Not entirely, my young sir. Is your confidence based on the friendship of this David Greig? You think his regard for you would prevent inquiry?"

"It might, or it might not. I don't know. Old David has a great sense of duty. My confidence is not based upon his regard for me."

"Then upon what is it based?"

Willard smiled provokingly and was silent.

It restored some of his self-confidence to see that he had rather baffled the others.

But Mr. Smith was an acute man. He knew when there was nothing to be gained by questioning. Instead, he said, "We have your word that you have such a confidence, together with a good reason for it?"

"Is the word of a potential thief any good?"

"My dear sir, a thief is not necessarily a liar. One sometimes specialises."

"All right, you have it."

"There is just one more thing. We wish to do our best by you. We wish also that no suspicion, through you, be directed toward Herr Stumpf. When you are all ready, let us know and we will help you with some outside arrangements which may serve to direct suspicion toward other and more indefinite quarters. I think that is all."

Mr. Smith rose as if he were ending an audience. He smiled at Herr Stumpf, his tiny, tight smile, and Herr Stumpf smiled back, a smile very fat and wrinkly. Willard, standing between them there, suddenly saw red. They held him in their power, these smooth, smiling men. They knew he was their tool and they thought he was their dupe. Well, he would show them that they were mistaken in that thought, anyway. Willard's brain had not been idle during this interview. He had, in fact, been thinking against time. Scraps of David's half-heard explanation came floating back with deeper meaning. When they talked of the "firm" he had with difficulty concealed a sneer. What reputable firm would have use for stolen plans? But give the "firm" another name and the thing was clear.

"I'll get these plans for you," said he, "because I don't believe it matters a hang whether you get them or not. But if you think you fool me with your mummery, Herr Stumpf-for-the-present, and Mr. Smith-for-convenience, you've got another think coming! There's no firm in Canada or elsewhere that wants stolen plans, but there may be governments who do! Good-afternoon!"

Without waiting for the escort of Herr Stumpf, Willard banged out of the library and, deliberately taking the wrong passage, banged out at the front door.

When he had gone, the other two looked at each other, this time without a mutual smile.

"He is quicker than I thought!" said Mr. Smith quietly. "Does he know much about you? Your associates, etc?"

"He has been about with me a good deal, yes."

"It is unfortunate."

"Yes."

"We can't afford unfortunate things just now. It is very near, Stumpf—almost any day!"

"And England?"

"The word is that England will not dare to meddle —at present. So our position here will be doubly valuable. We must run no risks, you understand?"

"I understand."

"But let him get the plans first?"

"Oh, certainly."

"I think that is all, then."

Very cordially they said good-bye. And Mr. Stumpf went out, by the side door.

XI

HAVING once clearly faced the issue and having made a decision along the line of his own best interests, Murray Willard was not the man to suffer from hampering scruples. Under the easy amenities of civilisation he concealed a soul which knew no higher law than its own desires. Many called him selfish but no one realised just how selfish he was. He concealed the knowledge even from himself. It was his habit to think of himself as a good fellow. Sometimes he did little services for other people just to prove what a good fellow he was. He would have been surprised to have had it pointed out that they were always services which cost him nothing. When any such kindness threatened to become a bore, he dropped it, just as he had dropped the task of freeing David from Clara. He had always considered himself very fond of David and up to the limit of his capacity it was true enough. Only when David got in the way of Murray Willard did his claim begin to dwindle; when he became a serious obstacle it vanished altogether.

Psychologists differ about these cases of intense egotism. But if Murray were to be used as an example he would certainly lend force to the theory of direct inheritance. Dr. James Willard, his father, had been a man whose callous indifference to everything not calculated to advance his own interests was a byword amongst his fellows. On the other hand, Murray's early environment and upbringing had not been very different from that of scores of other boys. His father had not done more than generally direct his education. His mother had died when he was too young to remember her but he had never lacked for care or training, good schools, wise masters and the daily companionship of sturdy good-hearted Canadian youth. He had in fact, had as good a chance as most and a better chance than many.

As a child he had not loved his father while he lived. Dr. Willard was not a man whom children would find lovable. But Murray had been proud of him, dead, because he had made the name of Willard a known name, a name almost celebrated. Had he lived longer, celebrity would certainly have come to him but he had died, when in sight of his goal, from blood poisoning caused by a neglected dog bite, received during one of his secret scientific experiments. His death had made little difference to the boy; Murray had never seen much of his father. He remembered him chiefly as a strikingly handsome man of whom he was oddly afraid. What the fear was based upon he did not know, for he could recall no actual unkindness. It was something in the eyes, he thought. They were very fine eyes but—well, Murray never looked into those fine eyes if he could help it; and when news of his father's sudden death was brought to him he perplexed every one by the whispered question, "Are his eyes shut?"

After the removal of his brilliant parent by the poisonous resentment of a mere dog, schooling had done its best for the orphan. He had lived in a world of carefree, happy boys and had taken on their semblance. He was, to all intents and purposes, as they were. He spoke their language, subscribed to their ideals, and visited at their homes; yet through it all the essential Murray Willard knew no change. He remained the egotist, the "man-for-himself" which he had been born. The problem of being "born that way" is something we haven't solved yet.

We have offered this brief history not to provide an explanation of Murray Willard's moral blindness but to hint that no explanation is possible. It will be necessary simply to accept him unexplained.

Murray left the house of the mysterious Mr. Smith that afternoon in an angry mood, but his anger was not caused by the thought of the traitorous work he intended to do. It was owing entirely to the fact that these men had been able to compel him to do it. Not for the first time did he roundly curse the weakness which had led him into the present trap. Why had he not been wise enough to wait untii he could really afford to indulge his passion for play? Since that passion was part of himself it must certainly be satisfied; but it would have been wiser, much wiser, to have deferred the satisfaction. As it was, he had made a pretty mess of things. He had run things pretty close, he had almost been counted out.

Only let him get on top again, and there would be no more mistakes! Let him once be free of Stumpf & Co. Let him once hold Stumpf's money in his hand and the world would pay Murray Willard for his present humiliation.

His mind thrust aside, now, even the pretense of consideration for his friend. David and his engine!—what did they matter in comparison with the fever of defeat and impotence under which he raged?

As for the actual theft of the plans, that ought to be easy. David was one of those silly asses who trust everybody! Murray smoothed his face clear of disturbing thoughts, settled his collar, and arranged his progress so that he might casually encounter David upon that trustful person's return from John Baird's workshop.

David was unaffectedly glad to see him.

"Well, he said, "how goes it? I thought you went away mad!"

Murray managed a somewhat sheepish grin. "Oh, forget it! I've just seen Stumpf. Told him that the whole thing is definitely off. Rather a decent chap, Stumpf! He wasn't as difficult as I fancied he would be, so we found another way out of my obligations to him; that is, if I can still negotiate that loan you promised me?"

David was much relieved. Money matters are the easiest of all to settle, provided the money can be got. "Certainly," he said heartily, "How much?"

Willard appeared to reflect and then mentioned a sum which, while not unduly alarming David, might be considered large enough to account for his former urgency.

"Will that clear you?"

"Yes, and I'm going to stay clear. I haven't been at all up to form lately and I'm going to cut the merry game for awhile—nerves! Every one seems a bit jumpy these days, yourself included."

"Me—jumpy?"

"Aren't you? You act like it. It doesn't matter at all about the engine now, but you did behave foolishly about it, you know. European war—Fixed idea and all that. Same thing that ails old John. I shouldn't wonder if you even keep your precious plans locked up?"

"As a matter of fact, I do."

Murray nodded. "Thought so!" he said.

"Perhaps it does seem crazy. But John's arguments affect me against my will. And in any case it does no harm. The plans are in John's private safe at present. Not the workshop safe but his own special one. Any one who gets them there will deserve them—and anything else he gets!"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that he would get some nice surprises. John keeps a lot of things in that safe and has utilised a few of his own ideas for safeguarding them. I'll let my plans stay there until I go down to Milhampton."

"Better take the safe with you!"

"Oh, it isn't as serious as that. They won't be disturbed in Milhampton."

"When are you going?"

"In a day or two. If you're feeling seedy why not come along?"

"Better not, I might steal the plans!"

"Yes, I'm sure you would!" in friendly derision. "But say, I'm in earnest, Murray. You're looking quite as bad as you feel, and a few days change will fix you up. Cousin Mattie, like Billy Fish's girls, is 'always glad to see a friend.'"

"That Silly Billy isn't going is he?"

"No, but Clara is. She hasn't been at all well; almost fainted in the store the other day. She has a fortnight holiday and Cousin Mattie is going to do great things with the air and food cure. Milhampton air and Milhampton cookery will cure anybody. Come and be cured."

Willard felt a throb of elation. This was easier than he had expected. His luck must be turning at last!

"It sounds very pleasant," he said. "Let you know later."

"No, I want to know now."

"All right. I'll come, if you're sure I shan't be one too many. Thanks."

They parted with mutual satisfaction.

"You say the young man has invided you oud of town to his working-place and the blans vill be there?"

"Yes. There is no use trying to get them from my uncle's safe. But there is probably no safe at all at Milhampton."

"And he does not susbect?"

"Not a particle. I didn't suggest going. He invited me for the good of my health."

"Ach! Your health, it iss not goot?"

"It is very good, thank you, excellent." For no reason at all Murray was annoyed at the kindly question of Herr Stumpf. The little German shrugged his fat shoulders.

"So? But id iss true you do not look vell—with health, one never knows."

"I tell you I am perfectly well."

"Yes, yes!" agreed Herr Stumpf soothingly. "Now, aboud our liddle pisiness: you vill find the blans and the vay to ged them. Then you vill let me know by the simple code I haf arranged. I vill send down a goot man and mine own liddle car which is not so slow as she looks. You vill ged the pabers and pass them to my man oudside. He vill arrange that id looks like a housebreak. You can further brotect yourself by giving the alarm—when he iss safely in the car. You can say you were disdurbed by a noise and you haf run oud to see—they vill pelief you, iss it?"

"They'll believe me all right! But how about the man? If I give the alarm they will go after him."

Herr Stumpf smiled.

"They may bursue," he said, "but they vill not capture. That iss brovided for."

"I have nothing to do with that?"

"You," said Herr Stumpf slowly, "vill have nodding to do with that."

"All right. Now about the money and the note. I get them before I hand over the plans."

"That iss also brovided for."

"It might be a good idea if I were to fire a shot," suggested Murray.

"Id would be still bedder if our man should fire. Id would lend—what you call—admosphere."

"Well, I don't know! He would have to be a good shot. We don't want him hitting anything *besides* the atmosphere!"

Herr Stumpf laughed heartily at this joke. But between laughs he managed to reassure his young friend.

"He vill be a goot shot," said Herr Stumpf.

XII

WHEN Clara heard that Willard was to make a fourth in the little party at Milhampton she turned so white that even David noticed it.

"Don't you want him to go?" he asked uneasily. "I thought you would like it. You two always seem to get along so well."

"Well enough," said Clara, angry at her self-betrayal. "What's his idea in going to the country?"

"Don't let Cousin Mattie hear you call it 'country,'" he laughed. "Willard's going for the same reason that you are, change of air."

"Does he know that I am going?" asked Clara. She spoke very low for it was an effort to control her voice.

"Yes, I told him."

Clara turned away. She did not want any one to see the look of triumph which flashed into her eyes. Willard, the dilatory, was rousing to action at last. He was following her to Milhampton and, to Clara's mind, so long revolving around a single idea, this could mean but one thing. He was jealous. He intended to fight for her.

The relief of this conviction, following upon the depression of the last months, was so great that Clara wept her heart out, when David was gone, and revived like a flower after rain. Sure instinct told her that Murray was not going down to drowsy Milhampton for any change of air. Nor was he the kind to do anything without a purpose. What could that purpose be, save one?

Confidence in herself and in her methods of managing men came flooding back. Willard had tested her power to the utmost but it had been equal to the strain. When it came to the point he had found it impossible to give her up.

Clara was happy. For herself she had long ago signed the articles of surrender. Her little, selfish, orderly scheme of life lay broken at her feet and she did not even glance at the débris. She, who had planned always to take, now gave, lavishly, endlessly and asked no better.

David was to take Clara down to Milhampton on Monday morning and on Saturday afternoon they were to have had a last paddle up the Humber. But Clara, with the prospect of a regained Willard to occupy her, had no time for mere canoeing. She needed Saturday afternoon to trim a hat. Also there was a chance that Murray himself might phone or even call. Not for many canoe rides would she have missed that chance.

David was accustomed to taking Clara up the Humber, because they were engaged and it was the proper thing for engaged couples to do. He wanted Clara to have all the proper accessories. So did Clara, but it is hardly necessary to say that these expeditions were not markedly successful.

The Humber is a charming river. It is a river made especially for lovers. To them it offers that most delightful of all seclusions, the isolation of two amongst the many. Its gaiety surrounds but does not stifle; its many voices call but do not trouble; its slowly slipping stream; its green-brown banks where trees hang over; its sun-bathed fields and little vales of shadow live in a thousand memories as part of the magic world of love and youth. There is an old mill, too. Long ago its millstones ceased their grinding, yet what a busy, useful mill it is: where once it ground out flour now it grinds out dreams. What used to be reality has now become romance. Quiet rests now where once there moved the miller and his men—quiet, and that faint flavour of decay which seems to touch young joy to a new keenness, heightening the pleasure of to-day with the threat of time's destruction.

But to enjoy old mills and charming rivers the mind must be atune, and the lack of this essential harmony explains why Clara and David never really found the secret of the Humber! also why neither of them felt at all disappointed when on this last Saturday Clara phoned and said she couldn't go.

"I have such a very bad head," said Clara plaintively, "acute neuralgia, I think. It wouldn't be wise to risk the sun. Couldn't you take some one else?"

This was the first time in all their acquaintance that Clara had ever suggested David's taking some one else, and it surprised him so that he had no answer ready.

"You might take your little friend, Miss Selwyn," suggested Clara's voice over the wire.

David always bit his lips when Clara referred to Rosme as his "little friend." Only a sense of humour saved him from futile rage. Clara knew that it annoyed him and therefore used the expression as often as possible. She hadn't intended to use it to-day, however. She had not intended to suggest Rosme at all but just at the last moment she had been seized with a sudden panic—what if David, deprived of his canoe ride, were to come over personally to inquire after the neuralgia? Anything was better than that. Besides what did it matter, now? Only a little while and nothing that David did would matter any more. In her restored elation even her dislike of Rosme Selwyn suffered eclipse.

"Too bad you can't go," said David ignoring the suggestion, "but if you're not feeling up to it, there's no more to be said. Can I do anything?"

"Oh, no," said Clara, "all I want is quietness."

David replaced the receiver and went back to his work-table. But the room was so hot, so stuffy! The perfume of the flowers in the window-box which Cousin Mattie had installed during her last visit only tantalised him with a memory of the breath of the woods.

Take some one else? Well, why not? Take Rosme? Why not, also? It might be the last chance he would ever have of an afternoon with her. He thought of the "Last Ride" with a somewhat dreary smile—"who knows but the world may end to-night!"

He went back to the telephone. There might be a chance that she was free to go.

There was a chance. Circumstance, who really seems to have been doing her overworked best for these two, had arranged it so that Rosme was spending her half-holiday indoors. She, also, was trimming a hat. But hats, in themselves, are negligible. When David asked her what she was doing, she said "nothing," and when he asked her to go on the Humber, she said "yes."

It was a very warm day. People whose faces get red and whose hair comes out of curl dislike warm days and quite rightly. Even quite pretty girls look wilted under these conditions. But as there are some flowers to which heat brings new fragrance, so there are girls who bloom more distractingly under the hot sun. Rosme was one of these. The clear pallor of her skin glowed like warm ivory; her burnished hair lay close and silken with golden tendrils in unexpected places. The open collar of her soft blouse showed to perfection the lovely, creamy neck. Cool shadows lay in her long eyes.

David had never before seen her all in white, and white, say what you will, is the colour for summer and for youth. Rosme was white from the crown of her shady hat to the tip of her dainty shoe—a soft, beautiful whiteness against which her bronze hair burned.

She carried a little basket in her hand but what was in the basket she wouldn't tell.

"It may be almost anything," she said, observing its closed cover with respect. "Maggie made it, the Infant packed it and Madam tied it up with string because the cover's catch is broken. My instructions are to lift it by the handle only, to keep it in the shade, on no account to sit on it and not to open it until we're really hungry."

"I feel hunger coming on—oh, I say, isn't it a heavenly day!"

"Rather!" said Rosme contentedly, settling herself in the canoe. "And it's heavenly that your cushions are blue! Had they been red I should have been regretfully compelled to cast them overboard. Talking of casting overboard, do you know how to drown kittens?"

"Certainly not!" in alarm.

"Oh, I didn't intend to ask you to drown them. I just wanted to know if you knew how. There must be some way of doing it. Perhaps one could take a correspondence course?"

"Why not! Were you thinking of going in for it yourself?"

"Not myself. I am already specialised. But some one in our house will have to do something soon. The neighbours are complaining. Just as if it isn't worse for us than it is for them. We have seven new ones."

"Neighbours?"

"Kittens. Maggie undertook to drown six and prepared the mind of the Infant by displaying just one, a big one; quality instead of quantity, you see. The Infant wanted quantity but had become resigned and we were comfortably at breakfast when in walked the mother-cat with the extra six! They were very wet but not a bit drowned. It seems Maggie had shut her eyes when she—er—did it, and the anxious mother had seized both the opportunity and the kittens. I don't know what we'll do now. The Infant has them safely counted and, even if she hadn't, Maggie says it's unlucky to drown anyone twice."

"There might be a risk!" said David laughing. "Do you want to paddle?"

Rosme didn't want to paddle, that is, if David could manage alone. It was much nicer to be lazy. She did not add that it was much nicer to sit with one's back to the prow and look at the paddler, but perhaps that is what she meant. Bareheaded and without his coat, David was more than ever a figure to arrest the eye. Rosme, stealing a look from under her eyelashes, felt his strong grace with a delightful quiver. And how like sun-lit water his eyes were and how dear it was that his hair would never lie down properly!

"This is really a very beautiful river!" said David with the satisfaction of one who makes a discovery. "And so changeable. I have never seen it quite like this before."

He never had. But it was not the river that was different.

"Beauty is such a curious thing," he went on. "It comes and goes. Billy Fish was talking about it the other day and offered a quotation, 'Beauty,' he said, 'is all in a fellow's eyes.' He said it was from Shakespeare."

They both laughed. "But of course," said Rosme dreamily, "some things are always beautiful. A day like this, a moonlit night—could anything ever sully them?"

David shook his head. Yet even then horrors were preparing which would make men careless of the brightest day and turn the moonlight to a thing of terror. Three years later, when of these two in the canoe one was in London and the other in France, David was to write to Rosme: "All my life I shall shudder at the sight of the moon—when it shines I know they are bombing London!"

But that was very happily in the distance now. The paddle rose and dipped, the green shores slid by them, music and gusts of laughter fled past like happy ghosts. They were alone in a world which held only themselves and the gliding river.

"Do you know Pauline Johnson's 'Paddle Song?'" asked Rosme.

"Drift, drift,
Where the uplands lift
On either side of the current swift?"

"I wonder if she paddles a swift canoe somewhere on some shadowy river? No heaven would be home to her without the wind and the water and the trees."

"She was part Indian, wasn't she? Indians have all those things. I rather hope we have them, too."

"So do I. I never liked the pearly gates and the harps and the singing. When I was little I was almost as much bored by heaven as I was afraid of hell. I remember asking once if there wasn't some place in between where a little girl might go and be happy."

"And the answer?"

"Shocked silence I think. But really, with two such alternatives, I think those old, very orthodox people must have been very brave to die at all."

David nodded. "I suppose it takes courage anyway," he said. "But life takes courage too. Angus used to say courage was the one thing no man could live without."

"Women too?" a little wistfully.

David smiled. "Angus' ideas about women were very old-fashioned. I am afraid you wouldn't agree with them."

But for once Rosme let a chance to argue the woman question go by. She trailed her hand in the slipping water and was silent. Presently she suggested that they fulfill the second part of Madam's instructions and take the basket into the shade.

David's paddle turned obediently. It was odd, he thought, that he had never before realised what charmingly shaded nooks there were on this enchanted river. Places where the water was green and gold flecked; places where the sun through the leaves wove changing patterns on a girl's white dress and soft uncovered hair.

They fastened the canoe and scrambled upon the sloping bank, the basket between them. A picnic party, hidden by the trees were shouting with laugher somewhere near, and they smiled in sympathy. But the easy talk of their former meetings became more and more difficult. What but silence is left when the things one burns to say are things forbidden. What need for speech, anyway, when one may understand without? David and Rosme were very close to understanding.

Without knowing that he did so, he used her name. "Do you remember when we played Pirates, Rosme?"

"Yes. You had a smudge on your nose and a scar made of the blood of a red geranium across your cheek and your hair stood up—just like it's standing up now!"

David passed a futile hand over his hair.

"And you gnashed your teeth!" said Rosme. "I wonder you have any teeth left."

"You refused to gnash yours, I remember, but you put a green leaf over the two front ones to make believe they were out, and you had a black patch over one eye and a nasty black bruise on your arm which——"

"Don't let's talk about that," said Rosme quickly.

"All right, but I remember that I wanted to go right in and behead your aunt. You said you could behead her yourself—when you wanted to! You had a dagger in your boot and two in your belt, besides the cutlass and pistols. Indeed of the two I think you were the more desperate character. You insisted that every living soul on our captured ships should walk the plank."

"I liked the way you made them go 'plop'" explained Rosme.

"And when I suggested, most pusillanimously, to spare the women and children, you said, 'what, clutter ourselves up with a lot of useless baggage?' I admired you terribly for that!"

"I thought you suggested it because I was a girl. And you did, didn't you?"

David admitted that perhaps he had.

"It was a hot, still day just like this," she went on. "Doesn't it make you feel little when you think of millions and millions of hot, still days. All those that have gone before and all those that will come after? I feel as if I would like to hold just one of them tight and never let it go."

"This one!" cried David, who had suddenly turned pale.

"No, no—just any one! We—we musn't be silly! Let's go on talking about pirates. Do you remember how we buried the pieces of eight. We had nothing that would do, so I cut the buttons off my winter coat and we hid them on a desert island. Oh, David, they're there yet."

"Didn't you ever dig them up?"

"No, we swore, you know, that we wouldn't—not one without the other."

"But, what did you do when it came time to wear the winter coat?"

Rosme dimpled. "I pinned it up with safety-pins inside. Aunt was so furious about the buttons she wouldn't get me any more."

"What else did aunt do?" he demanded sternly.

But if aunt had done more than this Rosme wouldn't tell it.

"You were a loyal little thing!" said David. "Haven't you ever thought it strange that we only met that once? If we had seen more of each other when we were children——"

"We would probably have quarrelled horribly," threw in Rosme hastily.

"Rosme, I have never told you why I did not come back next day as I intended. It was because when I got home that night I heard about my father. He had died that day."

"Your father?"

"Angus Greig was not my real father. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Yes. I knew you were adopted. But I never heard who your real father was."

"Neither did I—the name, I mean. I wouldn't let Angus tell me. It wasn't a heritage to be proud of."

"But David—one's own name!"

"Greig is my name, if I never disgrace it. Angus gave it to me. But it was that bit of news which changed things so quickly for me. In a fortnight I went away to school. I tried to see you at church, but you weren't there."

"Punishment for the sin of omission!" smiled Rosme. "I expect I hid in the drawing-rooms. I hated church, David, I believe it was because we were so lonely that we liked each other. You had Miss Mattie and Angus Greig and I had Frances, but a child is always lonely without parents, don't you think?"

"It depends on the parents."

"Well, when I am a parent, I am going to make my children so happy when they are little that no matter what happens to them afterwards they will have that much capital to live on."

"Capital?"

"People live on happiness. When they have used it all and there is no more, they die."

"I wonder?"

"They aren't always buried, of course. There are plenty of quite dead people walking around."

"But——"

"But of course it is possible to die of other things—hunger, for instance. Aren't you starving? Please pass the basket and let's see what's in it."

This, David realised with a sigh, was the end of their talk. One does not discuss life's problems over a lunch of chicken sandwiches, celery, pickles, frosted cake, and raspberry vinegar. All these things were in the mysterious basket. David and Rosme ate them all in rotation, scarcely conscious of which was which—a sad waste of pleasant sensation. Then they repacked the basket tidily, set out a dainty feast of crumbs for the birds who hopped hopefully near, and set out upon their paddle back down the rose-flushed river.

The brilliance of the afternoon had quieted. Long shadows lay along the banks, mysterious dust stirred in the reeds, a whispering breath from the lake beyond was cool with the coolness of night and the wide water. But still the glory lay upon the tree tops and gleamed rainbow hued from the mirroring river. David's paddle dipped slowly, very slowly! but how unrestingly the current bore them on; how quickly the dusk followed them; how chill was the wind from the lake.

"Our beautiful day is going to end in rain," said Rosme with a shiver. "See how quickly the clouds are gathering over there. Madam Rameses will have bad dreams to-night."

"Does Madam dislike a storm?"

"They always make her dream. And lately she has been worried about her dreams. She says she hears a noise of children crying, many, many children! What can it mean?"

"Nothing." David's mind was not on Madam Rameses. "You should not let her fancies distress you."

The storm came so quickly that the first big drops were already falling as they paddled in. The rest was always a blur to David—the long ride in the car, the hurried dash through the pouring rain, a stumble just at Madam's door and a rescued Rosme for one tiny instant in his arms, her face in a flash of summer lightning, beautiful and sad. Then "good-night" and her voice, low and broken in his ear.

"Oh, David! if you loved her, or she loved you—if I knew you would be happy——"

Then nothing but a closed door and the rain beating down.

XIII

"IF she only loved you!" Rosme's words were the last thing in David's mind before he slept that night and they were still there when he woke in the morning.

This was the second time he had had it suggested to him that he might, as it were, he giving everything for nothing. David was not conceited. He was diffident and modest to a degree. That any woman should love him held for him elements of wonder. But on the other hand, that any woman should wish to marry him for any other reason seemed too fantastic to consider. Love is like the wind, blowing where it lists. People love the most unlikely people. So it was possible that Clara might love him. She had said so, often enough. Surely she might be expected to know her own feeling?

Nevertheless the little hope which had stirred when Murray Willard offered him freedom, stirred again now. He was glad that Clara was going down to Milhampton for if by any chance she was beginning to see that their engagement was a mistake their close association in his quiet home would confirm her suspicion. She certainly had not seemed happy of late.

But whatever hope he had based on this assumption was utterly quenched at the very outset of the visit. Never, since their first meeting, had David seen Clara more happy and excited. Her langour was gone. She laughed frequently and rather loudly. She talked a great deal on all kinds of subjects leaving her sentences half finished and her ideas hardly begun. She and Willard fenced and jested and appeared to enjoy themselves immensely. David was too busy getting ready for John's coming to be with them much but neither of them seemed to suffer from ennui on that account.

Willard, indeed, had lost much of his old pleasure in his host's society. David's warm friendliness, his utter lack of suspicion, irritated the worst in him by appealing to the best. Murray's purpose was fixed and he did not wish it disturbed by any scruple. Therefore he amused himself with Clara and waited with what patience he could for the coming of John Baird. Nothing could be done until John's arrival for John was bringing the plans. This arrangement, which had been made at the last moment, was an unfortunate setback but Murray consoled himself with the reflection that it would have been necessary to wait for a few days anyway. Also the rest and quiet was doing him good in spite of himself. His eyes grew clear and colour came back to his face.

"You see," said Miss Mattie with satisfaction, "all you needed was fresh air and good food."

"Especially good food," he told her. "If I were dead I think I would sit up should I smell your coffee at breakfast."

Murray liked Miss Mattie. He liked her so much and spent so much time teasing her that Clara grew almost jealous.

"What do you see in her?" she asked pettishly. "I'm sure she wasn't very cordial to you at first. When David introduced you at the station she acted so queer—asked your name twice before she was sure of it and forgot to shake hands."

"What did you make of that?" asked Willard with his provoking smile.

"Make of it? Nothing, except bad manners."

"But Miss Mattie's manners are delightful. I'm afraid you are not very observant, my dear Clara."

"Well, if you know, you might tell me."

"Perhaps it was because when David wrote that he was bringing down a friend, no name attached, she naturally expected to see his shadow, Billy Fish?"

"It was more than that!" said Clara stubbornly. "Had you ever met her before?"

"Never."

"Well, anyway she did act queer. And she does yet. She is nice to you, of course, but she watches you all the time."

"I know. She is watching me to see if I am good for David. She hasn't decided yet."

Clara tossed her head.

"Murray," she said coming closer to him, "what are we staying here for? Can't we go now?" Then, meeting his look of slow astonishment, "Don't let's pretend any more! Don't look as if you didn't understand. I can't help guessing what you came here for, Murray, and—you needn't wait any longer. I've made up my mind!"

"You guessed—what I came here for?"

Willard's voice was quiet, but there was a note of strain in it which Clara caught and misinterpreted. Her cheeks reddened with an unfamiliar blush. "Silly boy!" she whispered. "Of course I guessed that you came for —me!"

"How clever of you!" said Murray. His tone was like the flick of a whip and Clara drew back as if he had struck her.

"Didn't you?" The question was so low that he hardly heard it. But it's whispering cadence startled him more than any amount of shouting would have done. This thing was getting beyond a joke. He had seen women in earnest before and knew it for a danger signal. Clara's misunderstanding of his presence in David's house was almost funny—but not quite. It might quite easily be dangerous. Disappointed women are the very deuce! He temporised.

"Aren't you enjoying yourself?" he asked, ignoring her question. "What's the hurry? I hate being hurried."

"I know, Murray, but—I want it settled. I'm not finicky, but our being here doesn't seem—nice. I want David to know. He's been pretty decent to me——"

"Oh, it's David you're thinking of!" with pretended anger.

"You know it isn't. It's you, always you! And I want every one to know it."

"And I—don't. I want things to remain exactly as they are, at present."

The "at present" was a concession and he managed to put so much of hopeful meaning into it that the girl forgot her moment of suspicion and smiled again. To make a perfectly good job of it he kissed her.

"Little girls shouldn't dictate," he told her, teasingly. "I'll go when I get ready. But if you don't want to wait——"

Clara returned his kiss with a kind of bitter passion. "I'll wait," she said, "only don't play much longer, Murray, I can't stand it!"

"Oh, the devil!" said Murray, but he didn't say it out loud. He was aware of a growing certainty that if Clara's delusions were dangerous, her disillusions would be more dangerous still. What a fool he had been to involve himself with the girl at all! He began to positively dislike her.

Fortunately, John Baird was due upon the morrow. David had had a letter announcing his impending arrival and his hope that when he did arrive David's other visitors would have departed. To this David had replied that he had no intention of hurrying his guests' departure but that a little human society would doubtless do John Baird good. He added, in a comforting postscript, that the workshop was quite separate from the house and that mealtimes only happened three times a day.

John grumbled and hesitated but finally he came and, with him, came Willard's opportunity.

"Here are your plans, David," said John grumpily. "And like as not you haven't even a safe to keep them in."

"But I have!" triumphantly. "There's an old safe out in the workshop where they'll be as safe as in a bank."

"Safer," assured Miss Mattie. "It has a combination. I've kept my best cameo pin and the pearl brooch Angus gave me there for years. The combination is——"

"A secret!" interrupted David, laughing at the expression on the inventor's face.

"If we begin to get nervous, John," he consoled, "we can fix up a few of your pleasant little thief-catchers later on. In the meantime I'll take the responsibility."

Murray listening eagerly felt a glow of satisfaction. It was going to be easy.

"Who would want to steal old plans?" asked Clara in surprise.

"If David made them they are probably very valuable," said Miss Mattie. "Perhaps, Davy dear, we ought to get a dog."

They all laughed at this and the matter of the plans was dropped. David took John off to look over the workshop.

"We're going right ahead, John," he said. "My secret purpose is to get you started here before you decide that the Sarajevo affair was another false alarm; otherwise you may refuse to start at all. Looks as if we have been frightening ourselves for nothing, don't you think? It is almost a month now and Austria has done nothing."

"The most alarming thing she could have done," snapped the old man. "Why has she done nothing? If I knew that, I'd know it all."

"I've been reading up a little by myself just to get some arguments to floor you with," grinned David, "and I find that old Francis Joseph didn't exactly love his headstrong heir. Perhaps he was not as sorry as he seemed to have him out of the way, together with all the complications promised by his romantic marriage? If Franc Ferdinand ever sat on the throne, he would see to it that his children followed him. And the old Emperor had sworn that they never should."

John shook his stubborn head. "Not so simple as that," he declared. "If that were it they would have made more fuss just to prove that it wasn't. The deeply pained and sadly bereaved Emperor would have demanded satisfaction from Servia in a voice loud enough to cover his thought. Instead of that—silence. Nearly a month of silence! I tell you it is ominous."

"But why?"

"They are getting ready. They mean to have a good start. And they want the harvest in."

"It's too monstrous!"

A look of very human worry appeared for a moment on the old man's cynical face. It startled David more than the words which followed.

"I may be wrong," he admitted. "David, I believe I'll be thankful to be wrong. But I never pick up a newspaper now without expecting—something. It doesn't seem logical that they should let this chance go by."

"But no one is ever logical, nations least of all. Bet you anything they're afraid to take the chance now that they've got it! What do you think of my workshop?"

"Not too bad. David, why do you have young Willard down here? The boy is no good."

"He is your own nephew! You're not fair to him. You never have been fair. Murray's all right."

"He is the true son of his father and his father was a bad man."

"So was mine."

"I thought," said John Baird slowly, "that you did not know who your father was?"

"Neither I do. But I know what he was. And he was not good. So, as you are so fond of logic, the inference you draw in Murray's case is quite as inevitable in mine."

John smiled his grim little smile. "We'll let it go at that," he said.

Clara had not had a chance of a word alone with Willard all that day. It seemed to her that he deliberately avoided the possibility. Clara was not at all stupid but this puzzled her. Why should he avoid her when her company had been, apparently, the sole reason for his being there? There seemed no answer to this, unless—unless she *hadn't* been the sole reason! Clara forced herself to consider this, although the confusion of mind into which it threw her made reasonable consideration hard. If she had been mistaken, if her goal, which had seemed so near, had again eluded her, no plausible hope of ever reaching it remained. She tried to set her will steadily against this insidious fear. She tried to be coolly confident again. She tried to be sensible. If Murray had had another reason for his visit to David it ought not to be hard to find it out. One can find out many things by watching.

Clara began to watch. She watched so closely that the little flash of exultation which Willard showed when John Baird produced the plans, did not escape her. But its meaning did. Of what possible value to Willard were the plans of a not yet manufactured engine? He didn't build engines, or sell them or even understand them.

Perhaps it was his uncle and not the engine which interested him? He might want money from John Baird. He might be jealous of David's friendship with the old inventor. This seemed quite likely. But though she watched very carefully all that day she detected no attempt on Willard's part to play the dutiful nephew. When John and David went off to inspect the workshop, leaving the plans on Miss Mattie's sewing-table, he did not attempt to follow them, neither did he so much as look at the envelope which held the plans. Instead, he watched Miss Mattie make berry pie, teasing to be allowed to trim off the crust. Murray in this mood was wholly boyish and delightful and more completely puzzling than ever. Perhaps he would arrange to see his uncle alone in the evening? Clara watched for that. But quite the opposite happened. Willard avoided John Baird even as he had avoided her. And his good spirits persisted. He and David behaved like a pair of children playing with Alice the cat. Clara tried to forget the pain in her heart and play too, but it was a sorry pretense.

"You look tired, my dear," said Miss Mattie. "Davy, if Clara and I go upstairs do you think you'll remember to put Alice in her basket and lock the door?"

David thought he could safely promise, and the two women said good-night. But though Clara left Miss Mattie at her door, she did not enter her own room. She slipped into a dark corner of the stair and waited. John Baird was already in his room. David would stay below to lock up. She might manage a private word with Murray as he came upstairs.

The murmur of voices in the sitting-room seemed to last for a long time but at length she heard David push back his chair and rising, open the door.

"You're not going out again to-night are you?" she heard Willard ask in evident surprise.

"Only to put the plans in the safe. I promised John. Better come and see that I do it properly."

"No thanks," with a yawn. "I'm for bed. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Murray was coming now! Clara ran down the steps, waiting with beating heart in the shadow of the stair.

But he did not come. He had gone into the kitchen after David. Clara tapped her foot impatiently. What was keeping him? She waited a moment and then followed. But Murray wasn't in the kitchen either. The door was open. Clara ran to it and looked out—she was going to see something at last! But all she saw was an empty garden with the workshop quiet in the faint moonlight. David and Murray must both be inside. But no! There was a moving shadow outside, under the window from which came the light of David's electric torch. The shadow lifted itself and peered in, intently watching. Then it stole quietly back across the garden. The girl, drawing herself behind the open door, saw that it was Willard. Willard spying on David? Watching in secret what he might have seen openly? Why? In a moment he passed her, going directly upstairs and into his own room. Clara waited until she heard him close the door before she slipped from her hiding place. Her desire for a private word had quite evaporated. She lay long awake, her mind in tumult, her eyes burning in the darkness.

XIV

AFTER her wakeful night Clara came down to breakfast looking so unrested that Miss Mattie exclaimed in hospitable dismay. Hadn't she slept well? Was her room too hot? Had she remembered to leave the little door to the balcony open?—it was quite safe. Had Alice come up and scratched at her door in the night?

Clara managed to answer all this solicitude satisfactorily and tried hard to eat her porridge to save herself from more.

David looked kindly at her across the table. He wondered if all girls changed so much and so often?

"John and I are going to be horribly busy all day," he said. "There's such a lot of arranging and settling down to do. We shall hardly have time to eat. How would it be if the rest of you went off for an excursion somewhere. It's a gorgeous day."

"Oh, we don't want to be a bother," protested Clara quickly. "We'll just spend a quiet day. Perhaps Mr. Willard will take me for a walk."

Something much nicer than that, my dear," beamed Miss Mattie. "I knew David and Mr. Baird would want to be at their work so I've arranged to drive you both to Plaskett's Pond. It's really a small lake, quite charming. And Ballard's livery stable have a horse which is quite trustworthy."

"Is it alive?" asked Murray dreamily. "I had forgotten that there were such things."

"Automobiles are so dusty," declared Miss Mattie," and it's small pleasure going anywhere when you get there so fast."

"I think I'd rather just stay quietly at home," repeated Clara miserably. But this was so unlike her that nobody believed it. They all united in assuring her that Plaskett's Pond was exactly what she needed. Even Willard threw in a word of persuasion. He was sure, he said, that such a return to the simple pleasures of our fathers would be quite refreshing. Only, Miss Mattie must drive, as he himself was afraid of horses. He had found them impossible to reason with. Even a monkey-wrench had no effect.

Clara looked at him out of heavy-lidded eyes. She was once more at a loss. If his business here had to do with safes and plans why should he light-heartedly agree to spend a whole day driving about country roads? Had she made another mistake? Well, at any rate as long as they were together nothing could happen except under her eyes and she might find some way of ending her torturing uncertainty. She made no further objections.

Willard hurried through breakfast and stepped cheerily down to the post-office to post a letter, while Miss Mattie completed her arrangements. On the way he dropped into the telegraph-office and sent a telegram to a certain address in Toronto. The telegram had to do with the placing of a small bet. At least that is how it appeared to the telegraph clerk. The gentleman at the Toronto address read something quite different.

Murray whistled gaily as he hurried back. He felt as if he were already safe and free. He would follow Iago's advice and put money in his purse. After that it would be his own fault if life ever caught him in such a clumsy snare again.

One more day! Why did it matter how it was spent, so long as it was not alone with Clara! Once this little episode was safely over, he would be free of Clara, too, but just at present it would be unwise to provoke unpleasantness. The girl, to his experienced eye, looked already on the verge of hysterics. Miss Mattie's presence would be an excellent preventative. Therefore the proposed excursion of three met with his warm approval. There would be an opportunity, too, of consolidating his position with the third member of the party. Willard liked Miss Mattie but he couldn't be quite sure that she liked him. From that moment on the station platform when she had first heard his name there had been, as it were, a challenge between them. Her kind eyes had followed him, not criticising, not excusing, observing merely, with a large tolerance which seemed to understand, yet not to judge.

When the excursionists had driven off in the care of the perfectly trustworthy horse, David and John turned to their work with an involuntary sigh which was the same in kind if different in degree. There was so much to do and they were so eager to do it that the hours stole past unnoticed and they were still happily in the midst of it, dirty and hungry (having forgotten lunch), when Miss Mattie descended like a god out of a machine and ordered them to stop.

"I never knew a man yet that had any sense about his meals," declared Miss Mattie. "Look at the nice lunch I left, not touched! No Davy, you won't have time to finish that little bit! You'll both please go and wash. Supper will be ready in just twenty minutes."

To David's secret amusement old John responded to this treatment with a meekness which was entirely new in his philosophy. He did not even mutter as he put down his unfinished task, neither did he pause to pick up the evening paper which came hurtling against the front screen-door as he went upstairs.

So, oddly enough, after all his weeks of expectation, it was from a woman that the old war-prophet heard the news for which he waited.

"Any news, Mattie?" asked David carelessly as they came down to supper.

Miss Mattie turned from the social news back to the front page.

"Not much, dear. Just a little more about that terrible murder—the Archduke, you know, and his nice wife. The headline says Austria has sent a note——"

"What?" shouted John Baird, forgetting that good manners discount yelling at a lady.

"It doesn't say just what," said Miss Mattie placidly. "But I suppose they want to have the murderer hanged, poor thing! Although one must not pity a murderer. They will insist on an apology, too, no doubt. Though why a government should apologise for what it didn't do, I never can understand."

Seeing that John was hard put to it not to snatch the paper from Miss Mattie's hands, David availed himself of his privilege of reading over her shoulder.

"It's the Austrian note at last, John," he said. "But there are no details. The dispatch says merely that it has been sent and that Servia has—by Jove! they've given them only forty-eight hours in which to answer!"

"But I suppose," said Miss Mattie, "they could use the telegraph, couldn't they? That oughtn't to take long."

Both John and David were too absorbed to enjoy this, but Willard laughed delightedly.

"Yes, they might even cut rates on a night message," he told her. "What more could they want? Sorry you're disappointed, Uncle John," he added, meeting his uncle's scowl with gay impudence. "You rather looked for fireworks, didn't you?"

The inventor made no answer. Even his frown seemed absent-minded and remote. He ate his supper without appearing to know it and went early to his room.

Clara seemed weary too and David was frankly tired with a long day of good work. As for Willard, the drive had given him a nasty touch of neuralgia.

"Nothing to make a fuss over," he explained with a deprecating air. "I often have it. A good smoke is the best thing. I'll walk up and down the garden for awhile before I turn in. Please don't let any one wait up for me."

I'll put a hot-water bag under your pillow," said Miss Mattie, "and if you feel worse in the night you must promise to let me know."

Willard thanked her and promised. He was certainly playing in luck at last! Everybody going to bed early, tired out. No hysterics from Clara, everything lovely! Clara, in fact, was unusually silent. She made no remark at all when he mentioned neuralgia; said a languid good-night and trailed upstairs, hiding a yawn behind her hand. Willard, smoking in self-elected solitude in the back-garden, saw the light in her window shine out and presently grow dark again. "Good old Morpheus!" said he with a grin.

Presently he heard David kiss Miss Mattie good-night. Then Miss Mattie, herself called softly to know if he were all right. "Fine and dandy," said he, "I'm coming in soon."

Through the lighted kitchen window he saw her wind up the clock and put Alice to bed in her basket. Settling Alice took a long time, and there were various other last things. But at length, she too went upstairs.

Willard waited a little longer. But not too long. It would be better he thought, if some one should hear him when he came in. Presently he allowed his idle steps to take him across the garden in the direction of the workshop. The door was locked but Willard had not forgotten to slip the key from its nail behind the kitchen door into his pocket. One moment, and he was safely inside. Another, and he had twirled the old-fashioned combination of the safe as he had seen David do. Still another, and the plans were safely in his hand. He relocked the safe door. When Stumpf's man came it would be his business to make the breaking-in look like a crackman's job. Then, smiling at the ease and simplicity of it all, he rose and turned—to find himself face to face with Clara!

The exclamation he gave was certainly not one that Clara had ever heard before!

Nor did she really hear it now. She was not thinking of exclamations.

"What the devil are you doing here?" asked Willard roughly.

The answer was so obvious that Clara did not make it.

"Go back to bed!" he ordered with a look of stinging contempt at her negligée. "Do you want to make a scandal?"

"I don't care," said Clara simply. The exact truth of this apalling statement was so evident that it took even the resourceful Willard aback. When a woman doesn't care whether she creates a scandal or not she is a long way toward being invulnerable. Murray changed his tactics.

"You mustn't stay here," he said more kindly. "I'll see you in the morning."

"What do you want with David's plans?" asked Clara, still quietly.

"What plans—what do you mean?"

"I saw you take the packet. I know what is in it. What do you want them for?"

Willard began to shake with cold rage. To be thwarted now, with freedom already in his hands, and by a girl he had despised! He came close to her. So close that she could not miss the look upon his face. But Clara, who had been used to shrink before his anger, seemed scarcely to notice it. Instead, she went on in her unnaturally quiet voice. Her sentences were short and concise, very different from her usual slurred periods.

"They are all in bed," she said, "we are quite safe. I watched you come here. I watched you last night. I knew you wanted the plans. But I don't know why. That's what you've got to tell me. I don't care about you're being a thief. I don't care what you are. Can't you see that? But I've got to know what you are to me. I've got to know what you came to Milhampton for—these plans, or me?"

Willard thought swiftly. He was in a nasty box and he knew it. This girl for all her level voice was almost beside herself. She was, in her present state, capable of anything. Ordinary considerations of safety had ceased to have any meaning for her. She *didn't care.*

Yet, in its essence, her case was simple. She was mad with jealousy. Willard had seen enough of the green passion to know its symptoms. He knew also its antidote—if the case had not gone too far. With a smile which he endeavoured to make natural he looked into Clara's sombre eyes and answered.

"Both!"

The eyes still questioned him.

"I should have thought," he went on easily, "that you might have guessed. These plans mean money, money means—you."

"I have never bothered you about money."

"No, but, my dear girl, one can't marry without it. Not you and I, anyway."

He did this well. His manner of condescending affection was perfect. Clara caught her breath with a little gasp and all the tenseness went out of her. She might have fallen if he had not steadied her.

"You wanted it for our marriage?"

"My dear, for what else? I have enough to rub along on alone. But really, Clara, I'm awfully sorry you have come in on this. I didn't want you to know. I didn't want you bothered. The truth is, I'm broke. It was this way out, or none. These plans are worth a lot of money to me. They mean very little to David. Besides, David has my uncle on a string. He can get all he wants from him and I can't get a penny. This engine is partly my uncle's invention, so I'm only getting a little of my own back. Don't you see?"

"I—oh, it isn't that, Murray! I don't care about that. But you've been so strange—I thought you had just been playing with me—using me as a blind—that all you wanted were the plans—I—oh!——" She broke down and clung to him, sobbing wildly.

Willard mastered his rage.

"Please, Clara—don't!" he entreated. Then, appearing still to misunderstand, "I'm not really as bad as I seem. I'm not just a common thief, you know."

The girl quieted herself enough to pour forth broken protestations. She didn't care if he were a thief. She didn't care what he was. But of course he wasn't. She knew that. As for David—oh, she would be so glad to be through with David! He could make more plans, they were all that he cared about anyway. Let Murray get the money quickly so they might go away together and be happy. And he must forgive her—oh, he must forgive her for ever having doubted him!

Murray endured this with what patience he might, biting his lips.

"Clara," he said as soon as she would listen. "You're in on this now, a sort of accessory. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. So you may as well help me a little. But you will have to control yourself at once. I'll give you three minutes."

With an heroic effort, Clara stopped her sobbing. She was becoming able to think again and, with the return of coherent thought, came fear. Murray was breaking the law! He might be in danger.

"What if they find you out?" she gasped, shivering.

"They won't. That's what I want to explain if you'll stop shaking and listen. I shan't appear in this at all. There is a man coming to get these plans to-night. He will arrange everything to look like a safe-breaking. Then when he is ready to make his getaway I'll give the alarm. I'll be supposed to have been disturbed, you see, and to have given chase. I'll fire off Miss Mattie's old revolver that she keeps loaded in the kitchen cupboard—at the thief of course."

"You won't hurt him?" shuddered Clara.

"Oh, good heaven!—do be sensible! Now, this is how you may help. When you hear the shot, run down at once, *quickly*. You will be the first down. You will see me chase the thief. You will see him get away in his car; David and the others will be aroused at once, of course, but perhaps not quickly enough to see what it is wise should be seen. Do you understand?"

Clara, shivering violently said that she did. And of course she would do it; she would do anything—anything! But it was evident that she was still terrified. The capable coolness which Murray had often noticed in her seemed suddenly to have vanished. She had all the horror of her class of a policeman and the law.

"They—they might find out," she stammered.

Murray thought quickly. To let her go like this would be dangerous. He must tell her what he hadn't intended to tell, and though inwardly he swore viciously at the necessity his tone was still suave.

"Look here, Clara," he said. "I want you to understand that all we need in this case is a stiff upper lip. If they do find out (and it's next thing to impossible) there is no fear of anything save temporary, and private, unpleasantness. I've got a pull over David that he doesn't dream of."

"What is it?"

"Haven't you ever guessed for yourself what it is? We are half-brothers."

"What!"

"We can't stand here all night discussing it but it's a fact. My father was married twice. David is the older son. He was adopted when he was born. And he has never guessed our relationship—some nonsense about not caring to know his father's name."

"Oh, Murray!" Amazement at this bit of family history, and admiration of the use to which Murray intended to put it, almost steadied Clara. Her quick wits began to put two and two together. "But Miss Mattie knows," she said. "That is why she acted so strangely when she met you first."

Willard nodded with a reminiscent smile.

"And of course, I see now," said the girl, "why David sometimes reminded me of you. There's a queer kind of resemblance, although you are so different. Does your uncle know?"

"I think so, but with old John you never can be sure. We have never talked about it. He hated my father, you know—regular feud and all that. But this is beside the point. The point is that it's all in the family with the police outside—see?"

Clara said that she saw. She had stopped trembling and already began to look more like herself. To complete the cure, Willard took her in his arms and kissed her with convincing thoroughness. Then she stole back silently to her room.

A few moments later Willard, whistling softly, came in, closing the kitchen door with a slight bang. Miss Mattie heard the whistle and the bang and settled to sleep, glad that her suffering guest had recovered from his neuralgia.

Clara sat close to her widely opened window. She had stopped shivering. She felt warm and drowsy and happy. After her miserable day, the relief of knowing her worst fear unfounded was enough to dwarf all minor worries. Her thought was disjointed and not very clear, but she believed that she regretted nothing. Murray had taken David's plans—well, she wasn't sorry for that. David had taken Murray's uncle! She smiled at the crude humour of this. How clever Murray was, how cool! No one would ever guess—except herself. The secret would be a bond between them always. She was exultant over that. It brought him so much nearer—and she was to help! She was sure she would scream when Murray fired the revolver. Sudden noises startled her so. But a scream, she thought, would not be out of place. The more excited everybody was the better—what time was it? How terribly still the house was—heavens! what was that?

"That" turned out to be Alice, the cat who, being wakeful also, was taking a solemn walk to quiet her feline nerves. Clara said "sish" very softly, but Alice paid no attention. How fortunate that Miss Mattie was a sound sleeper!

Separated by only a partition, Willard sat, sunk in angry thought of the girl who dreamed so happily of him. Clara had crossed his luck! All the superstition of the gambler called down maledictions on her head. And his wounded pride rose up and taunted him. To be at the mercy of Clara Sims! It was a bitter pill for the arrogant Willard. Yet he had no illusions as to the necessity of swallowing it. The girl was harmless as long as she believed he intended to marry her but when she found out that he had no such intention anything might happen. There was just a chance that he might be able to frighten her by pointing out her own guilt. What was the phrase?—"accessory after the fact." But it was quite on the cards that she would blurt out the truth regardless of her own peril. Well, he must meet that danger when he came to it! Even if the very worst happened and he had to marry her, it was better than disgrace and a term in prison. Also it might be rather amusing to teach Mrs. Murray Willard what it meant to marry a man against his will! A cruel little smile played around his lips as he thought this—what time was it? He wished his code telegram had arranged for one o'clock instead of two. He wanted it all over—what was that?—Blast the cat! He would like to wring her soft, blue neck!

Anxious waiting seems to still the very pulse of time. But the pulse goes on beating. Half past one chimed from the parlour clock.—A quarter to two—five minutes——

Clara, motionless at her window, saw a quiet car glide down the tree-lined street. It stopped noiselessly at the end of the lane under the trees. She did not hear Willard leave his room. The old stairs were solidly built and did not betray him. But in a moment she saw him run across the grass. The moon had set early but it was not a dark night. By straining her eyes, Clara saw a darker figure detach itself from the darkness of the trees. Then the two figures went around the corner of the house in the direction of the workshop. In imagination she followed. She knew what was to be done there. The safe must appear to have been forced. That ought not to take long.—But it seemed long—— Should she go down? No. Murray had told her not to move until she heard him call—and the shot. It was wildly exciting—like a movie show! But the beating of her heart made her feel a little sick!

There they were, now! Murray was the one in the lighter suit—pajamas, of course. He was coming back to the house. The other man moved slowly in the direction of the trees and the lane. Another breathless, sickening moment and she heard Murray call—a chair in the kitchen was thrown over with a crash—the kitchen door banged—the mock chase had begun!

Clara flew down the stairs. As she went she heard a shot, and screamed.

Willard heard the scream, also a sleepy shout from David. For good measure he shot again, laughing as he did so—the affair was really an excellent joke! He could distinguish the purr of the starting car through the trees. Clara must be just behind. She could be witness to the get-away—but what was that? Something moved in the shadow of the trees—a thin spit of fire leaped out to meet him. Murray's racing feet stumbled, he faltered, spun round like a top and fell!

The hum of the motor grew louder for a moment, then lessened. A powerful car sprang forward, swift and effortless as the wind and vanished into the night. No need to waste a backward look. Herr Stumpf had fulfilled his promise. He had sent a man who was a good shot!

Clara, running swiftly, was almost near enough to catch Murray as he fell. She was excited but not alarmed. It was all just part of his clever acting.

"It's all right!" she whispered, smothering an impulse toward hysterical laughter at the easy success of their plans. Then, as she stooped to lift him, she felt something warm upon her hands and screamed terribly.

David and John, their steps winged by the terror of that scream, arrived hot-foot to find no nicely staged dénouement but the stark reality of a frantic woman desperately imploring word or look from the man who lay like dead upon her arm.

"Oh, Davy dear, what is it?" Miss Mattie had paused to bring a lantern and its yellow circle of light fell thin and clear around that tragic two upon the grass.

"It is Clara—and Murray," said David slowly. Wonder was in his voice, halting the words. And so long did he pause that John Baird pushed him impatiently to one side.

"What has happened?" he asked of Clara. "Has Willard been shot?" The dry and passionless voice controlled the girl's hysteria but she was beyond coherent speech. It was only with difficulty that he loosened her strangling arms sufficient to answer his question for himself.

"Not dead," he said briefly, "but dying—I think. Get the brandy."

"Dying!" Clara's hysterical laugh rang out. "He isn't really hurt. It's all a game. He's just pretending—to give time—to let the man get away. Murray, tell them! Murray!" Her voice rose to a shriek.

"Just keep her quiet a moment, will you?" said John coolly. "Now then, let's try the brandy."

They forced a spoonful between the tightly closed lips and watched for a moment while life, so nearly fled, fluttered back, hesitating. Willard's eyes opened.

"See, see!" cried Clara. "He is all right now. Oh Murray, why did you frighten us so?"

"Be quiet," said Baird sternly. "Let him speak while he can."

"Let me go—he wants me! Murray—Murray!"

But the dying man's eyes moved past her with indifference.

"David!" He could only whisper the name and that with difficulty.

The others drew back in silence and Davil still in his maze of wonder would have answered the call but Clara, lost to all reason now, threw herself in front of him. Out of the confusion of her terror and despair she knew only one thing—David must be kept apart from the man who had wronged him.

"Don't touch him!" she cried. "You shan't touch him. He hasn't got the plans! He gave them to the man—the man in the car. He had a right to take them if he liked. Don't touch him, David—you shan't touch him!" Her hands closed in a vicelike grip upon his arm.

David's wonder suddenly left him. His mind became suffused with a wonderful, sharp lucidity. How clearly it comprehended! How plainly it saw everything! Clara and Willard—Willard and the plans! Absurdly simple. And himself—what a fool! He could almost have laughed as he gazed into the face of the man who had fooled him.

The flicker of a cynical smile twisted Willard's blanching lips.

"Clara . . . no sense . . . never had!" he murmured.

At the sound of her name she would have thrown herself upon him, had not John restrained her with his iron grip. The agony in her face might have touched any one. But not Murray Willard. In death, as in life, he sought the thing he wanted.

"David!" he said, and tried to hold out his hand, already heavy with the weight of death.

But David, his eyes frozen in his dead white face, made no motion to take the seeking hand.

"It was true—what she said?"

Again the flicker of that cynical smile.

"I tried—other ways—first!"

From sheer weariness Willard's eyes closed, but next moment they opened sharply. In the clear light of the lantern in Miss Mattie's hand their glance was wide with a new and terrible knowledge.

"I'm dying!" Sheer surprise lent strength to the whispering voice. The wide eyes searched the circle of faces bent above him and read the truth there. Even the mightiest effort failed to lift his leaden hand.

"David!" There was fear in the whisper now.

John Baird moved uneasily. "Why don't you do as he asks?" he growled. "What does anything matter—now?"

But even the marvel of old John turned peacemaker could not reach David, lost in a realisation, terrible and stark, of the double treachery of the man he had called friend. Frozen, he knelt there without a word or motion.

Clara's crying filled the silence.

It was Miss Mattie's turn now. Down on the grass she knelt beside the boy she loved and that other whom she had foreborne to judge. Her clear eyes sought David's and compelled them with her kind, deep look—the look he had loved and obeyed when he was a little child.

"Take his hand, Davy dear," she said. "Whatever has happened, he is dying and—he is your brother."

She might as well have spoken to a stone. He had not caught her meaning. "Brother" meant nothing to him—the common uses of the term had robbed it of any intimate significance. Miss Mattie's eyes sought those of John Baird in anxious questioning. How were they to make him understand—quickly, before it was too late?

Then Mattie out of her eternal youthfulness, had an inspiration.

"Davy," she said, "don't you remember long ago how you used to wonder what would happen if you had a brother? This is your brother—your father had a second son. And remember, Davy, you always said it wouldn't be fair to judge."

From a long way off her words beat in upon his brain, shocking it even in its cold paralysis. . . . Murray his brother? . . . Murray his father's son, that mythical scapegoat over whose fate his childish mind had agonised? What could Mattie mean? . . . The thing seemed more and more a fantastic nightmare from which he would presently awake. . . . But no! There in the lantern light gleamed the face of his sometime friend, traitor and thief; there stood John Baird grim and silent; Clara's huddled figure was there, and there beside him waited Miss Mattie, her rare tears falling fast and warm upon his hand.

The tears disturbed him most of all. Mattie must not be allowed to cry like that. There was love in his heart yet for it welled up for her. But for this other, this dying man whom they said was his brother, he hated him, *hated* him! Not even for Miss Mattie could he lift that hated hand. A shiver of repulsion shook him. He turned away. . . .

"Oh Davy," Miss Mattie was sobbing unrestrainedly now. "Don't be so hard, my dear! Remember—what if it had been you?"

What if it had been you?

David's racing mind slowed in its feverish speed. Miss

Mattie's faltered sentence was like a bar of fire across its path. Beyond it lay all his childhood's fears and terrors—the dread that used to lay cold hands upon him in the night! The shadow that walked beside him. *This* was what he had feared! Here in this other man, his brother, was that dread incarnate. "What if it had been you?" Yes, he might have been like that. Who knew how barely he had escaped? Yet now he dared to judge his brother—hating him as Angus Greig had hated his father.

The icy hand which had been closing in about his heart relaxed a little, and swiftly, as if it had been lying in wait, came another memory. He saw a picture flashed upon the darkness of the night—soft lamplight on a girl's bright hair, absorbed faces bent above a dimly shining table—all the details of that evening with Madam Rameses and plainer than all that curious message: *"Hate is a poor thing. Remember that when hate is near you."*

It might have been the very voice of Angus Greig warning the boy he had loved.

The icy hand let go its hold. David's chest expanded in a long, deep breath. Warming memories rushed back. Memories of Murray when they had first been friends as little lads at school. That schoolboy so gay, so daring, whose jokes one laughed at and whose self-seeking one ignored, had been his brother. Surely something in him must have known! It seemed now that there had always been some tie between them, mysterious, far-reaching, not to be denied. From the first they had been friends; drawn to each other in their shy and boyish way. Once Murray had said: "I like you best of all, old David!" And now—well, he had sold that love, sold it and betrayed it! But, light as it had been, it persisted yet. Of all that had been Murray Willard's, this love alone remained to him; the one untouched and vital thing stretching out from the darkness of dissolution.

What then of David's love which had been so much the greater?

It could have been but a moment, yet it seemed an eternity that David battled with that question. Then he looked again into the pallid face, dead already save for the eyes which followed him. Murray's look of surprise and fear had faded, to be replaced by a wordless, eager watching. And it, too, was fading fast.

David knelt down again, gathering the heavy hands in his.

"What is it, Murray?"

No words, but still that eager, watching look.

"Mattie says we are brothers, old chap. Did you know?"

The slightest flicker of a smile answered this.

"I wish you had told me, Murray!" David's voice broke. "I wish to God you had."

Something like content stole over the dying face. The lips moved.

I—liked you—best—old David," they murmured.

Then the light in the watching eyes went out.

XV

DAVID lay in the room which had been his from childhood. He had grown to love its low ceiling, its narrow bed, its windows in the eaves. Many times had he eluded the benevolence of Cousin Mattie which would have transferred him to a larger room.

He had not slept, nobody in the house had slept, but a lethargy lay upon him, a heaviness, dreadful to his buoyant youth. Anything that life might offer seemed in these black moments scarcely worth the taking.

Love, friendship, loyalty—all these had failed, or, rather, they had never existed. Was old John the cynic right after all? Were the bright things his youth had worshipped merely names?

Common sense strove with him, pointing out in reasonable undertones that his attitude was absurd. Was love to be judged by Clara? Was love to be called liar because one foolish girl had lied in love's name? Was loyalty to be judged by Willard—poor Willard with a twist in his soul? Willard, whose father had sold his first born son for money to further his ambitions? At the worst, Willard, the son, had only sold his friend!

David lay very still, watching the gay sun weave patterns through the leaves across the window. He tried hard to think coherently, but again and again his mind slipped off to memories. Memories of himself in an agony of childish fear in this very room, on the night Angus had told him of his parentage.

Had that other son of the same father ever suffered like that? Had he, too, shivered under the menace of an evil which he could not understand, or see, or grapple with; but which he felt might lie already crouched in his own heart, waiting its chance to spring? Had he met this dread and fought it, as David had fought, through many ghastly hours? And had he, too, like David, won through to a sense of peace and safety—a peace that mocked and a safety which betrayed? For it was evident enough that, at the last, Murray Willard had followed the leadings of his nature. His fight, if he had fought, had been in vain.

And if Murray had failed, why not Murray's brother?

David tried to look into his own soul, but his soul veiled itself from his gaze. He pursued, but it withdrew, silent, inscrutable!

He knew now that he was capable of cruelty. He had felt it wake and stir within him when in the first shock of his disillusion he had seen the dying man's hand stretch out toward his own. He had wanted to hurt—to hurt to the uttermost! That he had not done so seemed to be of small significance.

His attitude to Clara, too—he could scarcely be proud of that. A man with a kindly nature would, he felt, have been sorry for Clara. But he had not been at all sorry. He had watched her utter breakdown, and listened to her frenzied grief over the body of her dead lover without one spark of pity. His mind had coolly pieced together the sordid tale of her treachery and comprehended exactly how he had been used and duped. The effect had been a kind of sick disgust. Every fine and gentle thing seemed soiled and smirched, held up to jest and ridicule. To have been such a fool!

Miss Mattie had wept with the weeping girl. But David had felt only impatient. Did not this argue some signal lack in his nature? His sick fancy assured him that it did.

He was free. He told himself this over and over.

But freedom seemed to mean curiously little. If loyalty were only a name and friendship a chimera, what was there in his freedom worth offering to—to anybody?

His bitter reverie paused here. The thought of "anybody" began to weave itself into the pattern the sun was making. Its yellow gleam he saw, was like the gleam of shining hair. The shadows of the leaves danced and wavered like leaf-shadows on the sunlit Humber. His feverish fancies quieted as the memory of that day stole back. The breeze from the garden blew sweet again. Friendship, loyalty—the mockery seemed to die out of the words. Again they clothed themselves with meaning and power. Had not his friendship with Rosme been a lovely thing? And loyalty? The thought which the word brought now was that of a little girl whose winter coat was fastened with safety pins because of buried Pieces of Eight.

Love? He did not dare to think of love just yet. But the great word glowed in the sunshine, washed clear of lying and deceit. Clara had never loved him, nor had he loved her. In her own way she had loved Murray. Poor Clara! Without knowing how it happened, David found himself feeling sorry for her. The balance of his nature, tipped so dangerously far, was beginning to settle back. The birds were singing so loudly, the sun was so yellow and kind. He felt ashamed of his lethargy. There was much to be done. He must get up and do it.

"Davy dear?" Cousin Mattie, red-eyed and worn but crisply trim as usual, looked tentatively in at his door. "You're not asleep, are you? Mr. Baird wants to see you."

She stood aside to let the inventor enter, which he did with a precipitancy which denoted unusual urgency. His brows were puckered in a prodigious frown and, for the first time, David remembered that the engine plans were gone. In the face of deeper tragedy their loss had seemed a trifle. But it would mean a great deal to John.

"I'm sorry about the plans, John," said David at once. "It's my fault. But I think I can guess where they are and we'll get them back."

"You can't guess where they are," said John tartly, "and you don't need to get them back. They are in my red morocco case at this present moment. So that's enough about that."

"They caught the thief?"

"Don't be absurd. They'll never catch him. He's away safely enough. But he hasn't got the plans."

"Then Murray didn't——"

"He thought he did but thought is deceptive. Just how deceptive, Mr. Stumpf & Co. will find out when they try to set up that engine."

"You mean the plans I locked in the safe were not the right ones?"

The inventor had the grace to look ashamed of himself.

"Now don't be angry, David. It wasn't you I distrusted. I don't know that I distrusted any one in particular. But I felt sure they would make an effort to get ahead of us some way, and it was useless to try to make you see it. So I took my own precautions."

They looked at each other for a moment. Then: "I'm glad they are not lost," said David gravely. "But —the uselessness of it, John! If he had lived we might have saved him, too."

The older man shook his head.

"He had the bad in him, David."

"Then so have I."

John Baird ventured a tight smile. "Maybe, but it hasn't made a traitor of you yet. No, my lad, we can't tell about these things. You escaped, he didn't."

"It may all have been owing to circumstances. I had Angus Greig and Cousin Mattie. If I had known he was my brother—if I hadn't been so foolishly stubborn about not knowing my father's name, we might have helped each other."

"It would have made no difference. You thought I paid no attention to Murray, but I knew him well. Still—he was my nephew and I have no ignorance of the tie to plead. If there is guilt in not having done more for him, I am guilty. But I hated his father, David, and hate is a pitiless thing. There was an old wrong. No need to speak of it now, but there was a wrong, cruel and bitter, between us. I let his son go his own way."

"Did you know who I was, John?"

"Not at first. I had begun to—to tolerate you before I suspected. I knew there was a son by my brother's first marriage and I knew that the child had been adopted. I never cared to enquire by whom. He was nothing to me. But after I had known you for a while, something Murray said, only a little sneering phrase, made me wonder. Did you know that you two resembled each other?"

"The boys joked us about it sometimes."

"The resemblance is slight. I did not see it at all at first. Afterwards, I kept seeing it all the time. I am sure that Murray himself knew who you were."

"But if he did, why didn't he tell me?"

"We can only guess at that. Perhaps he did intend to tell you, in his own time and way. Better forget it, David. You're not responsible for what you did not know. There is nothing so clogging as useless regret. And we are going to need all our energies presently. See here!"

He thrust into David's hand an early paper whose black headlines seemed to leap into startling life under his pointing finger.

"They are beginning to realise that something has happened," he remarked caustically.

David read the dispatches which gave to an amazed world the tenor of the Austrian note and, as he read the tragic events of the night seemed already little and far off.

"It's worse than ever I thought it could be," said old John. "It is such a note as no Christian nation in the history of the world has ever presented to another. If the Servian Government accept it, they deliver their country over, bound and helpless, into Austrian hands. And the forty-eight hours given them to comply is already half spent."

"But is Austria mad? What possible excuse can she give for such severity? The murder of an Archduke is hardly reason for the wiping out of a whole nation's independence."

"The archduke's murder is the occasion but not the whole excuse. They declare that the Pan-Servian movement, which is held responsible for the assassination, is in reality a Pan-Slav movement, and, as such, dangerous to Austria. Austria has known of the existence of this movement for years and is well aware that Servia has no more to do with it, in the sense of being able to control it, than we in Canada have with the unrest in Ireland."

"You mean that Austria intends to crush the whole thing and to secure by force what might otherwise escape her? But Russia will never allow that. Russia will protect Servia's independence at least."

"I think she must, or lose her prestige in the Balkans forever."

"Then Austria is bluffing—she won't fight Russia, John."

John's long, spatulate finger travelled down the columns till it rested on this brief dispatch from Berlin:

"Berlin, July 24—It is stated that Germany was not consulted regarding the Austrian note to Servia before its delivery but that she thoroughly approved the step taken and is prepared for all consequences which may issue from it."

"There's the answer," said the inventor slowly. "Austria alone might not wish to face Russia but Austria and Germany—yes."

The two men sat thoughtfully, the paper between them. It is doubtful if ever the old war prophet realised the tragic culminating of his own forebodings. David certainly did not, nor in this was he unlike many thousands of others who read the papers that morning with only a vague unrest. "Wolf" had been called so often in the Balkans!

It all seemed very exaggerated, very unreal. In that quiet room the clang of war awoke no echo. David threw down the paper. "I'll not believe it, John, it would be too desperately wicked."

"The heart of man," said John, "is deceitful and desperately wicked."

"It isn't, John! That's the mistake you always make. The heart of man is like your own heart—no worse, believe me."

"It could maybe be better," said John dryly. "I've seen this coming. I've said I was glad to see it come. But perhaps I lied in that. I'll take it back, anyway. David, I've come to this. I'd like to think they are right who call John Baird a pessimistic fool."

Such remarkable humility left David with nothing to answer.

"As for our own small problems," went on John, "we will say nothing of the real reason for what happened here last night, an attempted burglary, a shot in the dark; there is nothing unusual in these things—and the boy's good name will be safe."

David nodded, turning away his face.

But John had not said quite all that he came to say. He rose to go, but lingered.

"David," he began. Then, clearing his throat, "David, I suppose you understand that—er—I am now your uncle."

"Not any more than you have always been," said David comfortingly.

"I—what I want to say is—I hope you won't allow it to make any difference."

"I'll try not," with the glimmer of a smile.

The two looked at each other, a long, straight glance, not devoid of humour. Their hands met in an understanding grasp.

"I think it may be rather nice to be a nephew," said David.

XVI

IT was a breathless day in summer. So like was it to the day on which this history opens that Rosme, slipping through the front gate of the Widow Ridley's mansion, might well have slipped back ten years to find herself still playing in the garden.

The house drowsed in the heat; the fir tree shadows lay long and dark across the lawn; the clang of the gate was still the clang which had once awakened Aunt. Years had not changed either the shadows or the sun. But the house was changed. It was no longer the house of the Widow Ridley. It was nobody's house. The windows stared blank and lifeless.

Rosme, once the gate had clanged behind her, did not stay to notice the sameness or the change but, taking the Infant by the hand, ran with her into that other garden of more cheerful memories. Here in the warm shade, in the riot of weeds and bushes and hardy, uncared for flowers she drew a long breath. The seasons which had come and gone had left small traces here. The bees hummed drowsily. There were chirpings and whirrings in the grass. Birds accustomed here to a happy freedom hopped sedately along the old stone wall.

"Oh, I like it!" exclaimed the Infant, with an ecstatic sniff. "Is it your garden, Rosme?"

"No, but I used to play here when I was a little girl."

"Whose garden is it?"

"I don't know—the church's, I suppose."

The Infant looked puzzled; churches, she knew, did not have gardens. But God might.

"Is it God's garden, Rosme?"

"No—yes—perhaps it is, dear." Rosme's voice was dreamy.

The Infant, easily satisfied, disappeared in the bushes.

Rosme and the Infant had been in Milhampton for a week. They had come down for their fortnight's holiday just two days after the daring burglary which had ended in the shooting of Murray Willard; and had found the town stirred and stimulated to a most unwonted degree by that sad affair. Its details were on everybody's tongue and its interest as a topic of conversation eclipsed even the news from war threatened Europe. Say what you will, Europe is a long way from Milhampton, whereas Miss Mattie Greig, at whose house the tragedy happened, lived just around the corner.

And it was not a common burglary. Burglaries had occurred in Milhampton before. There was that time, you remember, when Mr. Williams the jeweler had chased a man down his back lane and had returned to find three solid gold watches missing. Fortunately, they were watches which had been left with him for repair. Then there was that robbery at Mayor Gray's when Mrs. Gray's diamond and turquoise ring and all the spoons, some of them sterling, had been taken and never recovered. But in neither of these cases had any one been hurt save in their feelings. This time there had been a victim—such a fine young fellow, too. Exceptionally fine, every one thought, for conduct such as his speaks for itself. To lose one's life in the defence of one's friend's home and property is surely the extreme of fineness—although foolish, of course.

The burglar had not been caught. This went without saying. A capture would have been a greater shock than the murder, since never in the memory of man had the Milhampton police caught anything. But there were plenty of interesting side topics without this. These were discussed interminably at every breakfast table in the place, Dr. Holtby's not excepted.

The Doctor's mature opinion, delivered over his coffee to Rosme on the morning of her arrival was to the effect that either the thief was a mighty good shot in the dark or that there is a fate in these things. The evidence pointed unmistakably, he said, to the fact that young Willard had shot first. An exceedingly foolish thing to do.

"It is never safe to fire at a burglar," he explained to Rosme. "You may kill him, which is always unpleasant, or as in the present instance, he may shoot back. If this young chap had not been so quick with his pistol it is probable that he would be alive now. And the thief didn't get away with anything, either." This last was added with an injured air.

His wife looked up from feeding little John his porridge. "I can't see what difference that makes, dear," she said in a puzzled tone.

"Well, it makes a kind of farce of it, doesn't it? The young man's death didn't defend anything, or save anything or—or anything," he finished lamely.

"But he couldn't know that," objected Rosme. "It doesn't make what he did less fine."

"Oh, women will insist on admiring foolishness!" fumed the Doctor, beginning to rattle the paper. And when the Doctor rattled the paper Frances always tried to change the subject.

"Did you ever meet this Mr. Willard, Rosme?" she asked.

"Yes. I met him once or twice in Toronto. And here's a curious thing, he struck me as the last man in the world to risk his life for anything. If it had been——" Rosme caught herself up suddenly biting her lip. Fortunately, owing to Bella having knocked over Paula's cup of milk, the slip was not noticed.

"It just shows," said Frances with an admonitory air, "that we ought never to judge. Bella, you did that purposely. I shall send you from the table if it happens again!"

"Rather a bit of luck for the Greigs that Willard's uncle was there at the time," observed the Doctor. "Naturally he took the bulk of the responsibility on himself. It saved David and Miss Mattie a lot. David was really quite upset; much more so than the uncle. As for the girl who was staying there, she went to pieces entirely. It seems she was the first to reach him after the shot—practically saw the whole affair."

"No wonder she went to pieces," said Frances. "Why, she might have been shot herself! She is a Miss Sims from Toronto. Several of us have been wondering if she can be *the* young lady—Mr. David Greig's fiancée, you know?"

"Well, I can assure you on that point," said the Doctor genially. "She is not David Greig's fiancée. Or else," with a knowing chuckle, "I don't know an engaged couple when I see one."

Rosme set her white teeth sharply on her underlip and hoped that Frances would go on questioning.

"One would hardly expect much demonstration—under the circumstances," said Frances mildly.

The Doctor shook his head. It was his experience that circumstances count for very little in such cases. "Depend upon it she is not the lady," he repeated. "I've seen them together and I know. Now if you had said that she was engaged to the other one I wouldn't be surprised. She took the death badly, very badly indeed."

"That might be nerves," said Frances. "Although I could tell in a moment if I saw her myself. Women know these things by instinct. Are you acquainted with her at all, Rosme?"

"I have seen her." Rosme's tone was remote. "But I do not know her."

"That's unfortunate. I was thinking that if you knew her it would be only decent to call, presently, when things quiet down."

"She's gone," interposed the Doctor. "Gone home. Really quite broken up. Miss Mattie went with her. They left yesterday with David and the uncle, on the same train that carried the casket."

Frances was palpably disappointed.

"Then I shall have to find out from Miss Mattie on her return. Rosme, why are you spreading a second piece of bread for Bella? She seldom eats more than one piece at breakfast and I never allow her to have her butter so thick. I find that butter makes her bilious."

Rosme, who had indeed been spreading butter with a reckless hand and an undiscerning mind, murmured an apology. She had exulted when the Doctor had spoken and now she felt ashamed of her exultation. To be glad, *glad* that David and Clara did not act like an engaged pair—surely that was a depth of meanness to which no decent mind would condescend? Didn't she want David to be happy? Of course she did. She wanted nothing else so much. And yet it was true that she had not been able to control that thrill of satisfaction, that little throb of joy. "He can't be happy with That Girl—he can't—he can't!" Rosme was ashamed of her heart's triumphant certainty. But her heart itself knew no such scruple.

Then, with a moment's cool reflection, came depression. What did it matter how David acted to Clara if in the end he married her? And marry her, Rosme felt sure that he would. Every one in Milhampton would know it soon. Directly Miss Mattie came back Frances would "find out." Well, fortunately that would not be for a few days yet. And they were gone, David and Clara. She felt a definite relief at that. She would not see them together; would not have to meet them on the street, speak to them, congratulate! It was something which would have to be faced some time, but she was almost passionately glad that it need not be faced so soon.

Meanwhile the Doctor and his wife had returned to their discussion of the morning paper.

"What is the news about Austria, dear?" asked Frances with faint anxiety. "They're not going to let her fight that poor little Servia, are they?"

Frances seldom bothered to read the papers. She trusted to receiving all the news, which was really necessary, in tabloid form from her husband.

"Well, I don't know." The Doctor's tone was dubious. "Things look rather dusty over there. But I see that we are offering to take a hand. Sir Edward Grey has sent out an appeal for a conference of the great powers in London. That strikes me as rather a good idea. Give them time to cool down!"

"Too bad it does not seem to strike the Kaiser the same way," said Rosme quietly. She had read the foreign telegrams before sitting down to breakfast.

"Oh—yes—so I see! Still the Kaiser isn't everybody. It looks nasty, though. I don't like it. And the news from Dublin is serious. There has been firing on the streets. It's disgraceful that the government ever let things get this far."

"Oh dear!" said Frances nervously, "I hope no one was hurt! Baby, finish your milk like a good girl. Anyway, one should be thankful that it isn't England."

Just exactly what she meant was not apparent but the Doctor took a chance on it.

"If they can't stop Germany, it may be England yet," he answered cheerfully, "and of course England means us. But they'll put the brakes on some way. Somebody will step in. They'll have a conference. The thing's getting beyond a joke."

"But," said Rosme thoughtfully, "isn't it rather late? I thought that an ultimatum was rather final!"

"Oh, they can get over that. They can get over anything if they want to. Nothing is really ultimate save willing makes it so. Doesn't the poet say that?"

The Doctor had laughed at his own joke, folded his paper and departed.

That had happened just a week ago.

Rosme, remembering it now as she sat in the warm drowsy garden, wondered how she as well as Frances and the Doctor and so many thousands of others could have been so blind to the relative importance of things. The death of one man and the threatened death of millions; the sorrow of one girl and the possibility of a world in agony! But no one had realised. Even now, with the breaking storm so close that its thunder echoed even through Milhampton's sleepy streets, there were those who obstinately prophesied fair weather. War couldn't be. They clung to that although Europe shook to the tread of armies already marching and Britain held her breath for the final word.

It had been a strange, restless week. No one had been quite natural, though every one had tried to seem so. With the rush of outside events the little home tragedy of Murray Willard's death had fallen far behind. Time, leisurely so long, had suddenly drawn on his seven-leagued boots. By to-morrow he might have compassed another century, or stepped into a different world.

Rosme thought of these things as she sat in the garden. Thinking, too, of herself and of the little bits of life which had come to her since she had played there as a child. For life, she saw, comes to us in bits. "Here a little and there a little"—advancing, withdrawing, building up in unexpected ways our ultimate defences of experience. The Rosme of to-day was consciously different from the Rosme of last week and oh, so different from the Rosme of a year ago.

"I have grown up!" said Rosme with a long sigh.

The Rosme of to-morrow would smile at that!

Nevertheless it was true enough that her girlhood had passed a milestone. Love had been waiting for her there and now love would go with her whether the road were hard or easy. The shadow of renunciation, too, was there but she was too young to realise all that its sombre shade might mean. As long as David was in the same world with her, as long as she might love him, hope and youth refused to look at desolation. They enabled her even to imagine a saintly state of mind in which she could say: "I hope he will be happy with Clara."

For herself—well, for herself she could still dream. The rosy mists were still there. She would never marry, of course. That, to her half-awakened mind, seemed no sacrifice. Plenty of people are happy without marrying. Millions! She would devote herself to a career. Successful women lead full and happy lives and Rosme was determined to be, at least, successful. She would devote herself to the Infant and, if Frances wouldn't be too interfering, to Bella and Paula and John.

Naturally she would see David often—in a casual way. They could look at each other anyway. No one could object to that. And presently they could be Friends. Here without any apparent reason warm tears began to gather behind the softness of her eyes. The rosy mists lifted for a moment showing emptiness beyond. Would that be really all—just friendship? Only a look in passing? One tear fell and then another.

Rosme was very angry with herself for crying. It was a silly childish thing to do. Especially when one had just grown up and had determined to face everything with a noble fortitude. It was most annoying that the hollow place in her heart should so insist on aching in spite of all the dreams with which she tried to fill it—work, achievement, success; other people's homes, other people's children; and a look from David now and then! Why should all this seem suddenly inadequate? The tears came faster as she tried to stay them.

"Are you crying, Aunt Rosme?" asked the Infant with a lively interest.

"No," said Rosme, miserably, ignoring the obvious.

"Stop doing it then," urged the Infant with reason. "See what lots of flowers I've got. It's a lovely garden, Aunt Rosme, and it's so sensible of God not to have gardeners. I shan't have gardeners in my garden, either. When I get my children, I'm going to put them to live in my garden and not take care of them at all—not ever."

Rosme, spreading her wet handkerchief on the clover-tops to dry, was able to smile at this.

"Don't you like being taken care of, Infant?"

The child shook her head, drawing her brows together in a confirming scowl. "No, I don't!" The too passionate denial came quickly. "I'd hate to be taken care of like—like Bella and Paula and John."

"Oh!" said Rosme thoughtfully. She drew the child close and looked searchingly into the flushed and frowning face.

"You're jealous, Infant!" she said. "That's what's the matter with you—you poor baby!"

The Infant pushed her away. "What's 'jealous'?" she asked suspiciously.

"I don't know—exactly."

"Is it something that hurts when you haven't got a mother like little John?"

Rosme nodded. "Yes, that's it. And when you haven't—what are you staring at, Infant?"

"A man," said the Infant. "But I'm not rude because he stared first."

Rosme lifted herself from the sheltering tangle of grass. She had in that moment the odd conviction that all this had happened before; that she was living over an already familiar experience and knew exactly what would happen next. So there was no surprise, only wonder and a fluttering fear and pleasure, in seeing David's face looking at them across the wall. Then the lightning flash of memory or prevision faded as unexpectedly as it had come, leaving her to stammer a commonplace greeting.

"I thought you might be here," said David apropos of nothing.

"But you—I thought you were in Toronto." Rosme's hands strayed instinctively to her tumbled hair.

"I was," he nodded, adding obviously, "I have come back."

"What is the man standing on?" asked the Infant, in a shrill whisper.

"He is standing on a brick," answered David. "It is a very uncomfortable brick. He might slip off any minute."

"Won't you come in?" asked Rosme politely.

"I will come over," said David. "Thank you."

Rosme wished that the grass were longer or that her face were more in the shadows of the tree. She knew that her hands were trembling and that her cheeks were pink. She felt indeed, for all her involuntary joy, decidedly at a disadvantage. Since her way with David was to be the cool and sensible way of friendship it was certainly unfortunate to be caught with a handkerchief drying on the clover.

"What's the matter?" asked David. His eye had fallen on the telltale handkerchief at once.

"Nothing at all," said Rosme. "Infant, run away and play."

"Yes, do, Infant," said David warmly.

Yet when that obedient but interested child had retreated behind the nearest currant bush neither of them seemed to have anything to say.

Rosme, out of her unsought embarrassment was beginning to feel a little angry. It was hardly fair of David to come like this. It was hardly playing the game. She stole a look at him under her long eyelashes and the anger grew. Why did he look so—so satisfied? Almost happy! He hadn't looked like that when she had seen him last. Was it possible that her saintly wish had come true and that Clara was really—oh, wouldn't it be dreadful if she were!

"Is there any fresh news?" asked Rosme, trying hard to make her tone one of casual interest.

"News?" David's gaze was distracted and it was plain that her question had conveyed no meaning.

"European news," prompted Rosme.

"Oh! No—that is, yes. I mean—Rosme, you don't seem very glad to see me."

They were looking at each other now and neither seemed able to look away.

"I am glad to see you," said Rosme. She said it gravely. All at once and certainly she saw that evasion and pretence were useless and undignified. Her dream of a future which would include David—as a friend—

was suddenly whisked away. Mists, when disturbed, lift swiftly.

"I—I think you had better go away!" she added. (How David's heart leapt to the little break in her girlish voice.)

But he made no movement to go. Neither did that strange light in his eyes die out.

"I can stay if you'll let me, Rosme."

What was he saying? A bee in her hair, loudly buzzing, disturbed her—or was it a quickened pulse throbbing in her throat. And why did the crickets chirp so loudly?

"I want you to know. I want to tell you, Rosme—Clara has broken our engagement." Above the buzzing of the bee and the noise of the crickets she heard him say the words in a low, jerky voice unlike his own. "She never cared for me. You were right. And I—oh, Rosme!"

He had lost her eyes now. There was not even the tiniest glimpse of them visible. Shadowy lashes hid them well and the blush had faded, leaving her cheeks quite white. Panic surged on David and all his nice control went by the board.

"Rosme, look at me! Oh, my dear——" He caught her hand, crushing it; that hand which a moment ago he would have been afraid to touch. Fear armed him with desperate bravery. What if he had been mistaken and she didn't care at all!

"Rosme!" It was not a boy's pleading now but a call which her heart must hear.

Very slowly her white lids lifted. He had his answer—all that any lover needed—before they fell again.

"I may stay then?" David's whisper was so low that the greatly intrigued Infant behind the currant bush missed it entirely. But Rosme heard. The whisper was very close to her ear.

With a swift, contented movement which set the pleasant grasses nodding she turned to him; and somehow her happy head found just the place it dreamed of—where his kiss might fall upon her hair.

. . . .

The Infant behind the currant bush grew very tired of listening to people who would not talk. Soon she strayed away to play by herself and, when she had played for hours and was tired of this also, she came back to find that time had not even winked at the two amid the clover. Rosme and David were as she had left them.

"Oh, dear," said the Infant in a tone of acute suffering, "Ouch!" Apparently they were deaf as well as dumb. There was nothing left save the sense of touch to bring them to the knowledge of a still existent world. A pinch not too gently administered might help.

"Lucie!" Rosme's bright head lifted with a start.

"I'm so hungry it hurts," complained the Infant, "and there's a boy calling 'Extry'! He's calling so loud I'm afraid he'll bust hisself."

The lovers drew apart, listening. It was odd, they thought, that they had not heard the call before. Certainly it was loud enough. Clear and insistent it shattered the beautiful silence of their enchanted garden.

"Extry! Extry! Just out. Extry!"

There were other words, indistinguishable yet. David and Rosme looked at each other with swift anxiety. Already the world had come to dread that ominous cry.

"Can you hear?" asked Rosme.

They strained their ears to catch the tenor of his distant shouting.

"It may be nothing special," comforted David. "They have so many extras."

"Or it may be good news!" Rosme found it easy to believe in good news now. More than ever the thought of war seemed foolishly grotesque.

"Listen!"

Was it her fancy or did David's arm slacken its hold a little as he waited? And his eyes—what had made his eyes so suddenly grave? Why did they look past her, far away?

The boy was nearer now. He was rounding the corner.

"Germany—invades—Belgium!"

Rosme felt her lover stiffen beside her. It seemed that his face grew older while she looked.

"David—what is it? What does it mean?"

"It means War, Rosme."

"But not England? Not—us?"

He did not answer. Instead he drew her closer. There was no slackening in his arm now, no far away look in the eyes which sought her own. He kissed her on her lovely, rumpled hair, on the white triangle of her forehead where it parted, on her little, pink ear half-hidden by its wave——

Rosme forgot her question. David forgot his sure conviction of its answer. The newsboy passed. His calling softened into the distance—ceased. Quiet came back to the garden; quiet and the sound of bees and little chirpings in the grass. The great world grew small—and smaller—until it held but two!

And they were happy. For though War might find them to-morrow, to-day they had found Love.

THE END

PS 8524 K38M5

Mackay, Isabel Ecclestone (Macpherson)
Mist of morning

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY